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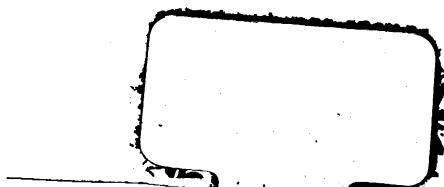
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# THE HANDS OF JUSTICE

BY

F. W. ROBINSON

AUTHOR OF

"GRANDMOTHER'S MONEY," "WOMEN ARE STRANGE," ETC.



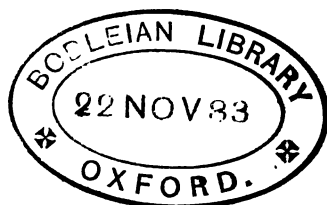
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600064419U





# THE HANDS OF JUSTICE





on which the glass was flaming like a fringe of fire.

There was play on the green grass, but hard work in the big brick house ; and John Woodhatch, standing with his hands behind him, and a solid ebony cane in his hands, seemed to mark the contrast, and to be, in his stern way, affected by it.

We say in his stern way, for John Woodhatch was a stern man, although one worth twice looking at, as at a something or some one out of the regular pattern—the set-smooth pattern, that is—of our every-day humanity. The men and women who crossed the common as he stood there—and he stood with strange patience, and for “no end of time”—glanced at him as they passed, stared back at him—three-fourths of them—after they *had* passed, wondering for a while who he was, and for what or whom he was waiting, with that deep-set, thoughtful look upon his face.

He was a tall, powerfully-built man, of some forty years of age ; upright and strong, keen eyed and sharp featured ; a man who had seen much of the world, and been bronzed, and generally highly coloured by something fiercer

than this English sun, in whose rays he was then standing ; a handsome man in his sternness, and probably the more attractive for having his hair flecked thick with grey. Beard, moustache, or whisker he possessed not, but his clean shaven face was no futile effort at a youthful effect ; “ hair disguised him,” he said, and he hated disguise ! He hated a great many things, did John Woodhatch, by the way ; and of that we may have clearer proof hereafter.

Presently he walked towards a green gate, let in the side wall of the institution, and, with a quick snatch at the handle of the bell, woke up the echoes with a summons that was unnecessarily noisy. The side door was opened on the instant, and a gawky lad, whose limbs were pushed so far through his corduroys that he seemed growing rapidly while you surveyed him, stood in a red-tiled passage—a sentinel on guard.

“ Well, of all the blessed rows—— ” he began. Then he stopped, looked at the visitor, and touched a front lock of red hair hanging over a low forehead.

“ Is Mr. Fretwell in ? ” asked John Woodhatch.

"Yes, sir. Will you step round to the front door, and——"

"No; I'll come in this way. You can find him this way for me as well as the other. What's your name?"

"Crapper," answered the young porter.

"Take this to Mr. Fretwell, Crapper. It is an official order to inspect the reformatory. I'll wait here till you come back. There's my card as well. Look sharp!"

Master Crapper departed swiftly along the red-tiled passage, opened a second green door, and disappeared.

Mr. John Woodhatch, unceremonious or curious, and not too particularly mindful of his promise to wait where Crapper had left him, moved along the passage also, pushed open the second green door, and entered upon a broad and spacious plot of ground, where he came, figuratively, to anchor for a second time; and, after his old habit, put his hands behind him, and planted his ebony stick firmly in the ground. He looked keenly to right and left of him, as one interested and observant; and the features relaxed somewhat of their sternness, and took so sad an expression to them

instead that tears might have come for an instant into the large, grey eyes of the visitor, the natural brightness of them were so suddenly and strangely dimmed.

And yet at first sight there was nothing to depress an observer; and it was a busy, healthy scene at which it gazed. Here were some two or three hundred boys learning the gospel of work, two or three hundred waifs and strays—the offscourings of the streets and gaols—wound up and set going, and in a different and better fashion than had been known to them hitherto. They were working hard, possibly with, here and there, a hard taskmaster over them, as might be necessary with such unmalleable material to deal with in the way of their respective characters. They were very busy, in long, low workshops, in sawing planks of Swedish pine-wood into blocks, chopping blocks into firewood, making wheels of wood and resin for speedier ignition of fuel, fashioning mop-sticks and broom-handles, copper-sticks and rolling-pins, handles of garden tools, and of all tools seemingly under heaven, and fetching and carrying, like ants in a big hive. They were very busy in

the floors above where the open windows were, and the pale, thin faces of more pupils of Mr. Fretwell's Academy for Young Gentlemen looked out furtively at the visitor in the grounds, and wondered "what the devil" his business was, and whether any trouble—always trouble somewhere!—was meant by his arrival. They were making boots in one room, and making them stout and strong and serviceable; they were hard at tailoring in another, busy upon their own suits of corduroys, and particular about the one red stripe running down the leg,—ornamental perhaps, but still too unpleasantly significant of Fretwell's school for some of them to like, those who wanted, at all hazards—at the risk of the prison even—to "cut and run" from it as from a lazar house, to the dark, *free* streets, from which they had been snatched, biting and tearing at their saviours. They were busy in the school-rooms on the other side of the great airing-yard, and there were boys, and youths verging on manhood even, poring over lessons, and with their turn for manual labour over for the day, thank God! There was music also welling from the windows of far-off rooms, and

boys blundering at present through the brand new march which the music-master had composed for the amateur brass band of that institution which John Woodhatch had called to inspect. There was a steam engine puffing and blowing in the rear, also employed in the pine-wood plank business, and lightening manual labour very considerably; and there were signs and tokens of industry everywhere in this big, pitiful school, where the pupils faces were all white and lined, and seared with grim expressions, and the rosy, smiling countenance of happy boyhood was a rare specimen to find.

“Does it seem such a very long time ago now?” muttered John Woodhatch to himself.

## CHAPTER II.

## JOHN WOODHATCH IS INQUISITIVE.

MR. WOODHATCH had scarcely done muttering, when the master of the reformatory, followed by the boy Crapper, appeared upon the scene. Master and visitor raised their hats to each other, and looked hard at each other; and Crapper, after a sidelong glance at them both, slouched off into the red-tiled passage, to play the part of Cerberus again, and to shut the green door behind him upon a bustling world.

"You would like to inspect the reformatory?" said Mr. Fretwell briskly, as he dangled sundry keys from the fingers of his left hand, and held Mr. Woodhatch's letter of introduction in his right.

"No; I don't think I should," answered John Woodhatch; "I have been over it often

enough in my time, and when you were a child."

Mr. Fretwell was surprised. He looked keenly at his companion for an instant, and then said—

"Indeed!"

"Your name *is* Fretwell?" asked the visitor curiously, as he surveyed the principal in his turn, a little dapper man, of some five or six and twenty, with small light eyes and sandy hair, and with a quick, business-like air about him generally, as of a man who trifled not with time, and was not to be trifled with himself.

"Yes; my name is Fretwell."

"You have succeeded to your father's post, then?"

"Yes, I reign in his stead," he said lightly.

"Dead?" inquired Mr. Woodhatch, and in allusion to the late master of the house.

"Oh no! Superannuated."

"And you prefer to follow in his footsteps and pursue a hard life—for it is hard and onerous, if you do your duty, sir,—to choosing some profession or trade, where money or honours are more easily earned?"



Mr. Fretwell shrugged his shoulders, although a shade of discontent seemed to settle on his countenance at the visitor's plain speaking.

"I don't know that I have ever had a chance offered me," he replied; "and this was a post to keep in the family, I suppose."

"Ah!—well—and the boys here?"

"Are about the same as ever they were," was the answer. "Good, bad, and indifferent—the former, a scarce article, but still to be discovered in the place, if any one cares to look for it. It does not appear to me that any one cares much, and reformatories are not fashionable," he added bitterly, after a pause; "but may I ask——"

"Yes; anything you like, but don't be in too great a hurry about it," answered the other quickly, and even brusquely.

"My time——"

"Is valuable. So it should be—so should be everybody's," added John Woodhatch again; "but I am here on business, and that letter of introduction in your hand makes it sufficiently clear that I have a claim upon your time, I think?"

“Oh, certainly, certainly!”

Mr. Fretwell was just in the slightest degree nettled, for the stranger's manner was peculiar, and seemed to be dictatorial, which it was not. He was sure that this visitor was one of the class that “wanted to know,” and to know too much—that wanted to suggest impossibilities and impracticabilities, that would alter the whole rules of the reformatory in about ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, if allowed the run of the rules, that would preach and theorize, and sermonize, and be generally fussy for one afternoon, and then go away again, and never be heard of more—not even in the newspapers.

“I have no particular wish to go over the reformatory,” explained Mr. Woodhatch again, “although I can hardly see the boys without. And I wish to see all the boys, and should like them marched out rank and file into the airing-ground.”

Mr. Fretwell did not respond to this; he marvelled at the coolness of the request, even at the man's “damned impudence,” but he simply folded up the letter of introduction, put it in the breast-pocket of his coat, and

stared blankly ahead of him. His silence did not strike the visitor as peculiar; John Woodhatch went on in his own decisive and straightforward manner.

"I hope your heart is in your work, Mr. Fretwell," he continued; "if not, you had better be dead or away. For this is a great, grand post, looking at it seriously."

Mr. Fretwell laughed in a forced manner and shrugged his shoulders again. Yes, he was evidently a discontented man, and the boys had tried his temper, and soured his disposition generally. And not admiring his visitor, he was more and more inclined to be pert and official—to snub him, even, should the chance present itself.

"I see the gravity of the position; the greatness and the grandeur of it has never struck me," he replied.

"I said, 'looking at it seriously,' " remarked the other, "not from your point of view, or from any man's, but from God's."

"Oh," said the master.

He was discomfited now a little. The new comer was a religious man, after all, and come to preach and rave; he would understand less

than any one else the difficulties and hardships in the way of managing an institution of this kind ; he wished the Reverend Athelstan Cream—who visited once a day—had not left, he would have turned this gentleman over to him, and sped back to his office. He was in for a sermon now, and yet there were letters to answer, and accounts in arrear.

“ I have often thought of late years what a deal might be done in a house of this kind, if the right man were at the head of affairs. I take it you are not the right man,” said Mr. Woodhatch, looking steadily at the master. “ I know your father was not.”

Mr. Fretwell reddened. Yes, this was a cool customer.

“ My father was thought a great deal of here. There has never been one word said against this institution in his time or mine, and a great many people have spoken well of it,” exclaimed Mr. Fretwell hotly. “ I am afraid, sir, you are too critical.”

This would put the visitor down, thought the principal, but it did not. If John Woodhatch were rude and abrupt himself, he seemed not to notice it in others. Indeed,

with some strong, deep thought ahead of him, he heard the words, but paid no heed to the manner of their delivery.

"Your father was weak at times, and a tyrant at times, and such a man is generally a failure," continued the visitor. "If I had power—the power of the State to back me, I could make this a very different place. One might work more reformation here—turn on a stronger light!—lead many a boy upward and over the hills instead of sinking him down, or letting him sink."

"You should put in for the post," said Mr. Fretwell airily.

"Not I. I am like a great many others—I see what good may be done, but I am not the man to effect it. I'm too hard myself, and I'm a devilish bad temper."

No—this was not a religious man. Variable in his moods, and garrulous, with no consideration for other people's time, and with an idea that *he*, the principal of the establishment, was there, at his orders, and awaiting his orders; confound him!

"Well, sir," he said restlessly, "we had better be moving."

They went on side by side.

"And yet I understand boys, I am sure," Mr. Woodhatch continued, "such boys as these, sent by orders of magistrates and judges, and set here to do their best or worst. To be saved, many of them, too—there's the consolation of it all, sir, eh?"

And here he pounced so suddenly upon Mr. Fretwell's arm, and tender muscles thereof, that Mr. Fretwell let out a little scream of pain and dropped his keys upon the gravel.

"I beg your pardon," said John Woodhatch, stooping politely to pick up the keys and return them to their owner. "You see I am excitable, and unfit for a post of this kind."

"Yes, sir; I perceive you are excitable—very excitable," replied Mr. Fretwell, rubbing his arm vigorously and marvelling and cursing at the other's iron fingers. He should be bruised to-morrow, he was sure.

"I was a boy here myself once," said Mr. Woodhatch. "Your father, I dare say, will remember me. He saw me off to Canada with thirty-nine other boys; it was twenty-five years ago this very day. A quarter of a

century," he murmured, "more than a third of a man's long life!"

Mr. Fretwell took out the letter of introduction, looked at it, and replaced it, saying—

"I don't remember the name, although you are on the old books, of course. And you come here——"

"To see what good I can do," he cried warmly; "to show that I am not ungrateful for the chance that was offered me; to do good in my turn, God willing that I should."

He stretched out his hand to touch the master's arm again, but Mr. Fretwell was on his guard this time, and adroitly evaded him.

"Precisely so. Very good of you too. You are one of the few gratefuls who turn up at times," answered Mr. Fretwell.

"Canada was my salvation. I learned to work in earnest there; I learned self-reliance, honesty, thrift. By degrees," he added, "I became a rich man."

"We should like your history for our record volume," said Mr. Fretwell, more interested now—more gracious, perhaps, if we may use the term.

"You shall have it."

"My father will be glad to hear of you again, I am sure."

"Oh, he wasn't a bad sort to me; but he wasn't the right man here. But I have said that before, I think."

"Yes, you have said that before," added Mr. Fretwell drily. "And may I ask in what way——"

"I want to take one of the boys off your hands, and see what I can make of him. I should be glad," he added, "to set one upon the right path, as I was set."

"To adopt one?"

"Hardly that; I don't quite mean that," was the reply. "It would depend upon himself, perhaps, as the world moves on."

"A few boys will leave this month; a greater number next. Some are going to Canada——"

"I will not interfere with *them*."

"Are there any there whose looks you fancy?" said Mr. Fretwell, as they entered the long low room where the firewood was being chopped, and where fifty or sixty boys looked up at once, grinned or scowled accord-



ing to their respective moods, and then began chopping vigorously again.

"It is not easy to pick one out," remarked John Woodhatch; "I have come to you for information on this point. That is the object of my mission."

"Oh! I see."

Mr. Fretwell put his finger to his lip and considered. Mr. Woodhatch looked with steady interest at the boys, spoke to one or two of them, then to the overseer in charge of them. He was a man of many questions—and a man who asked strange questions too. Boys and overlooker were soon puzzled with him.

"I was one of you, and worked liked you," he said to them, "and I went abroad and made my own way in the world. Try and do the same, lads; it is not so very hard to keep straight and push on. Think of it presently. Do."

That was all the sermon he preached before he went out of the room, but it was an earnest little outburst, and set the boys wondering and staring. He had come back to have a look at them. He had been one of them—that big,

strapping gentleman ! He had not forgotten what he had been !

He was a man who seemed to remember everything. As they crossed to another part of the premises, he startled Mr. Fretwell by saying—

“ You said reformatories were not fashionable just now, and you said it somewhat spitefully. What did you mean by that ? ”

“ Oh !—that we are *not* fashionable. People don’t seem particularly interested in us—think that a government grant does all that is necessary, and there’s an end of it. We don’t get many—hardly any—subscriptions and donations, and we are never down in anybody’s will.”

“ You will be down in mine,” said John Woodhatch,—“ you are down.”

“ That is very kind of you,—that—— ”

“ And as for a donation. Will you accept this now, before I forget it ? I should like a receipt in the morning, if you please,” he added in a business-like way.

“ Certainly.”

Mr. Woodhatch had drawn a cheque—which was already filled in and signed—from his

pocket, and Mr. Fretwell took it, thanked the donor, and glanced at the amount, which was a complete surprise to him.

"My dear sir, this—this is very princely! I am sure the Committee will consider itself deeply indebted to you;" and Mr. Fretwell made the rich man a low bow.

"It is what I purposed giving years ago. You will not forget a receipt to-morrow?"

"Certainly not. I will write it at once, when we——"

"No—to-morrow, please. We were talking about a boy. Is there any one just out of his time here?"

"That boy Crapper, who is on porter's duty, is a very steady, quiet boy, and perfectly trustworthy."

"He will do anywhere," observed Mr. Woodhatch; "you will find him a position of trust, and he will go on as he has begun, and there will be one more to the good. But I want a boy of whom you have despaired. I wish to try my experiments on the worst specimen you have, not the best."

"That's odd."

"No—it is natural. That is, in me," he

added. "I was one of the worst boys here—I was despaired of—I was set aside as hopeless and thoroughly irreclaimable, and see what I am now." This was rather a conceited remark, but Mr. Woodhatch was too much in earnest to blush at his own self-laudation. "I was saved," he added; "let me save another, and after the same fashion, if I can."

Mr. Fretwell thought again, smiled to himself, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I should think Greg would about suit you," he said. "He's our worst character—we cannot do anything with him—he's beyond our teaching and our punishment altogether."

"There is good in every one," said Mr. Woodhatch sententiously. "You have gone the wrong way to work with him. How old is he?"

"Sixteen."

"That's bad—that's rather old. Where is he?"

"Well, he's in our dark cell at present. He tried to set the place on fire last night."

"I will see him, please."

## CHAPTER III.

"GREG."

MR. FRETWELL hesitated. It was against the rules to see any one in punishment, or to allow the individual punished to see, or converse, with anybody. But Mr. Woodhatch was a patron of the institution now, had given a munificent donation, and was a being not to be slighted, if possible. Besides, here was a chance of getting rid of Greg; and, though Greg was the least deserving—out of this army of black sheep—of any chance being proffered him, it would be always a mercy to know that the institution was quit of him for good.

"I can show him to you if you like," said Mr. Fretwell at last; "we shall not find him particularly presentable."

"All the better," remarked John Woodhatch; "we shall find him as he is."

They crossed the big airing-yard towards a small building in the distance, a something that might be a sentry-box or a cupboard built of brick, with strong iron bolts and hinges to the outer door. Mr. Fretwell was followed, and by a sign which he had quickly conveyed, by some ten or twelve of the biggest boys of the reformatory, and two of the assistant-masters of the establishment. John Woodhatch regarded them with a little surprise.

"So bad as this, is he?"

"It is as well to be prepared, at all events," answered Mr. Fretwell evasively.

"Ah! when it comes to that kind of punishment," said the visitor, pointing with his stick to the dark cell, "we had better be prepared for anything. That is one of the mistakes here, Mr. Fretwell."

"What are we to do?" asked the principal.

John Woodhatch shook his head, but did not answer him; probably he did not know how to answer him. It had been a failure with himself, he could have said; but he had done talking of himself for that day, and he had done with preaching, too. Here was business to be attended to, the business upon

which he had come, and had very cautiously approached.

"Now, then," said Mr. Fretwell, a little flushed in the face, and a little apprehensive of results for all the self-confidence assumed, "let go!"

It was like the order from the captain of a ship, or a balloon, and a twitch at the corners of the visitor's mouth might have been taken or mistaken for a smile. The boys closed round about the door; curious, eager-eyed, and grinning boys, expectant of another "jolly lark" with Greg. One of the assistant-masters unlocked and unbolted the door and swung it back, and in an instant the inmate of the cell had bounded up two and three steps from the darkness into the glare of the daylight, and was in their midst, a white-faced, haggard being, his corduroys hanging in ragged festoons upon his limbs, and his mouth and nostrils smeared with the blood-stains of his last desperate conflict with opposing forces. Two deep-set black eyes, with a mad fire in them, took in the scene before him; and, though puzzled at the group, and wondering at it, he seemed only hesitating at this juncture as to

which way to spring, and to bring about him and the school the turmoil of some twenty-four hours since, which had ended in his summary consignment to "the dark."

"Steady, Greg; no more of this!" shouted Mr. Fretwell in his most authoritative tones; "we don't want any more nonsense. I've brought a gentleman to see you."

Greg was too confused or sullen to reply. The loud tones of the voice seem to check his first impulse to dash forwards, and he glanced furtively, and with much hate and passion in the glance, at the man who thus addressed him. It was like a prisoner of the Bastille, long hidden away from the world, coming out bewildered and half mad into the blinding light of God's sun.

"I don't want no genelman. If I had a brick I'd——"

"Greg Dorward, try and listen to me for a moment," said Mr. Woodhatch, stepping forward and laying his hand on his shoulder. Greg slipped his shoulder angrily away from the friendly touch, and went back a step or two distrustfully, and with the same furtive look with which he had favoured Mr. Fretwell.



Mr. Fretwell and his assistants listened attentively; the boys closed round more curious than ever. Later in the day, when the visitor had gone, it occurred to the master, for the first time, that Mr. Woodhatch had called the boy by his right name, though it had not been mentioned in any way.

"You don't like this place?"

"I hate it."

"You want to get away from it?" was Mr. Woodhatch's next question.

"I jest do."

"You're not going the right plan to get away from it, Greg."

"They can't keep me after the next two months, can they? I've done my four years then, ain't I? They won't murder me here, will they?" the boy inquired, in a husky voice, as a start off, but increasing *in crescendo* towards the finish.

"No, Greg, but after this—the prison! This is the Home of the One Chance, and you've been fool enough to turn away," said Mr. Woodhatch.

"I don't care about prison. I want to get there ag'in; it's better than this, ain't it?"

Why don't yer take me there? Didn't I try to set the place a-fire last night? Why don't yer do yer worst, and lag me for it? Why don't yer——"

Here Greg suddenly caught sight of one of his contemporaries who had hurt him last night in the *mêlée*, and with whom there had been a long outstanding feud; and, with a yell of defiance, he cut short his argument, and jumped towards him suddenly. There was a scuffling, a roar of many voices, the outbreak had come, and the "awful lark" was about to recommence—Greg did not care for numbers, for the masters, for the presence of any "blooming" visitor—when suddenly Mr. Woodhatch's arm was put out, and a hand of iron, and like an iron vice, was on his collar, and had brought him back within the circle, as though he had been a baby.

"Just listen to me first, will you?" said Mr. Woodhatch with grave politeness, "and then settle your little differences afterwards, and if these gentlemen will allow you."

"You let go my——" began Greg, when the voice of the man who held him, said quickly in his ear, and in his ear alone—

*"Quiet. I've come from Kitty."*

The boy gasped, stared, and was passive, and Mr. Woodhatch took his hand from the young prisoner.

"Greg," said Mr. Woodhatch, "all this does no good, and I want to be a friend to you."

"I ain't got no friends—I don't want any."

"What's the use of going on like this?" continued Mr. Woodhatch. "In two months, you'll be out. And in two months—if you'll keep quiet, and try to do your best—I'll come and take you away myself."

"I don't want yer! Who are you, to——"

"I have said before to-day that I was a boy as bad as you are now—very likely worse—and that in going from this place to the world outside, I met a friend who saved me, body and soul. Now, when you leave here, Greg, I hope to be the man, the true friend, by the help of God," he added very solemnly, "to meet you at the gates, and save you in my turn."

"I don't want to be saved! What the blazes do you want to save me for?"

"Will you let me try?"

“It ain’t possible ; that’s a game that won’t answer here. It ain’t to be done, I tell yer.”

“Will you let me try ? ” he said again.

“Try be——”

“For the sake of some one you care about—a father or mother.”

“Oh, they’re fine ’uns, and no flies,” exclaimed Greg, with a sudden shriek of derision at this appeal to his filial instincts.

“A brother——”

“Oh ! ”

“A sweetheart—some one who cares for you—outside there in the streets—an old pal, say. Say anything.”

It was an odd appeal this, but to the surprise of more than one, it seemed to touch some chord of feeling or sympathy, or strange association, and the youth looked up with a new appealing and yet suspicious look.

“I wonder who the devil yer are ! ” he muttered ; “I can’t make yer out. I never seed yer in all my life afore.”

“Will you let me be your friend ? Will you trust me for four and twenty hours, Greg, when your time is up ? Come.”

"If you like," muttered Greg, "just to see what you're up to."

"And if they let you out of this—if I beg you off—will you try for the next two months to be more like the rest of them?"

"No, I won't!" cried Greg at once; "I won't try here—only to smash that cussed Barnaby, and that feller there—and that one!"

"Ah! you'll think better of this."

"If I'd had a knife last night, I'd have killed one or two of yer, and been swung for it. And a blessed good job too for the lot on us!"

"We will attempt something more blessed in its work," said Mr. Woodhatch sternly. "There, go back to your 'dark.' In two months' time I shall see you again. I shall call for you."

Greg regarded him suspiciously again.

"It's a plant, I know," he muttered in reply, but he nodded as if in assent, and then with an all-round scowl slouched back into his cell, like a wild beast into its den, and the key was turned upon him and the bolts shot into their grooves.

When the boys had dispersed and the

assistant masters had gone after them, Mr. Fretwell and Mr. Woodhatch moved slowly towards the outer gate over which Master Crapper kept guard. Mr. Fretwell moved on thoughtfully and with his gaze bent downwards. He was more puzzled than ever with his philanthropic visitor; had it not been for his address card, and still more for the handsome donation towards the funds of the institution, he should have been suspicious of him. He was not quite certain that he understood, after all, the real motive for his coming, and why the man should pick out Greg Dorward as an object upon which to lavish sympathy and care and money—perhaps affection even—was beyond human comprehension, the result being so assuredly failure and loss of heart and faith.

He ventured to say something like this in a few words, and Mr. Woodhatch, who was thoughtful too, and, for a wonder, particularly silent, heard him out, and then said—

"It is worth the trial. I do not say I shall succeed."

"You see it takes away the chance from one more deserving," added Mr. Fretwell; "it

gives you work to do which must end in a miserable fashion."

"It is not for you or me to say how it will end," answered Mr. Woodhatch, "and it is beyond our power to guess at it. Good day, and thanks."

"Thanks to you, Mr. Woodhatch," answered the master.

"In two months you will see or hear from me again," continued the other. "Meanwhile, send me a receipt for the money."

"Certainly."

"And if you can make the boy's lines more easy here—touch his heart in some way or other—it may be an easier task for me outside with him," he added.

"He will not listen to a word."

"You will not make a case of this last foolish act of his—a police case, I mean? That would complicate the machinery with which I hope to work, and," he added ruefully, "it is complicated enough already."

"Oh, it was a wicked boy's outburst; we are punishing him our own way for that."

"And a very stupid way it is," observed John Woodhatch, bluntly, as he departed,

leaving first a shilling with Master Crapper for the trouble he had given him.

Mr. Fretwell watched him across the common for a while, and saw presently, to his surprise, that he was joined by a young woman—hardly a lady—who looked up at him eagerly as he approached her, and evidently asked him many questions.

"No; I'm hanged if I make you out," Mr. Fretwell said, as he returned to his office. "I'll have a good look at the old reports next Sunday, and see what *you* were like, and where you came from, Mr. Woodhatch."

But he could not wait till the following Sunday, which was his leisure day for "extras." The man who had called upon him that afternoon was more upon his mind than he had bargained for; disturbed him and his accounts, came between him and his office-books, his correspondence and his regulations; troubled him at tea more than his unruly family of five boys, who were all troublesome, and a pale peevish little wife, who seemed fading away behind the urn, which the youngest child was trying to tip over; troubled him when the work was done, and the house was still, and



all was reported well in the big establishment over which he had charge, and cut short the reading of a novel aloud to his wife, whilst she darned and burrowed through a mountain of socks.

“My dear, I must look at the old report-books; I can’t help it. The man was such a singular beast,” he said, starting up in the middle of a chapter, and rushing off to the next room, where there were many volumes ranged on shelves; records of lives and incidents far more striking than in most novels, and full of a deeper and truer pathos.

Twenty-five years ago to the very day, a quarter of a century, John Woodhatch had said. It would be easy to find him amongst the records, dated as they were, and alphabetically arranged, these fleeting glimpses of lives began, lives ended, lives “broken short and ending in a ruin.” Ah! here it was amongst the “W’s!” He turned up the gas-burner, and read—“*John Woodhatch, admitted to the Reformatory, August the 14th, 18—*.” Let him see what the old book had to say of this man—of the boy and his antecedents.

He did not return to his wife, and Mrs.

Fretwell, very sick of darning socks, and of her own meek, unobstrusive company, and a little put out by her lord and master's uncere-  
monious neglect of her, presently passed into  
the office after him.

"As if you hadn't time all day, Felix, to  
attend to this tiresome business," she said,  
as she entered; "as if——"

But Mr. Fretwell's position, sitting cross-  
legged on a chair, with his elbows planted on  
the open ledger-like volume, and his eyes,  
as she said afterwards, "popping out of his  
head," and his hands buried in his light straight  
hair, and sending it out all manner of ways,  
hedgehog-wise, cut short her protest against  
marital neglect.

"Good Lor', Fanny, just listen to this," he  
said inelegantly, as he became aware of her  
presence at his side. "Here's a rum start!"

## CHAPTER IV.

## GRAVE DOUBTS.

MRS. FRETWELL rested her two hands on the right shoulder of her husband, and looked down at the pages of this big ledger of human lives which he had been studying. She could make very little out of the cramped penmanship of her father-in-law, who had kept the books sloppily, and been evidently fond of smudges, for pure smudges' sake, so frequently had he drawn a finger over lines of statement which he had thought better expunged in this fashion before the ink was dry.

Felix Fretwell, the present ruler of this "Home of the One Chance"—as John Woodhatch had called it—had, however, already mastered the history, and was prepared to interpret it for his wife's behoof when she

would hold her tongue and allow him to proceed.

"It's a curious mix-up, and wants watching."

"Wants washing?" asked Mrs. Fretwell, who was a little deaf. "Who—what does?"

"Fanny, don't be quite a fool," said Mr. Fretwell plaintively, but rudely; "here's quite enough to harass a man without your ridiculous remarks. It looks like a plot to me; but then, why did he leave a cheque for five hundred pounds this afternoon?"

"Perhaps there'll be no money to meet it at the bank."

"Perhaps there won't," Mr. Fretwell said; "all his larks, after all. And yet he did not look larky; he seemed pretty well in earnest." Mr. Fretwell planted his elbows more firmly on his ledger, and ran his hands through his wiry hair again. "I might get into trouble in a minute if the Board turns against me. I'm not quite certain that Greg's all right now. I've sent to see."

"Well, what is it, Felix?" inquired his wife. "I don't see why you should worry about this more than about anything else. Where's the trouble?"

“The report says, Fanny, that John Woodhatch—the very man who came to-day, mind—was tried for attempted murder when he was eleven years of age. He could not read or write; he knew nothing of religion; he had neither father nor mother, nor any relations; he had been brought up as a thief, and in a den of thieves, where he stabbed a man with a knife, and ran away, leaving him for dead. It was thought the man would never recover, and his deposition was taken at the hospital. Oh! John Woodhatch was a terrible character then; and he did not improve much when he was sent to this place, *that* I can see.”

“Very likely,” said Mrs. Fretwell, phlegmatically.

“The reports are all against him; and the man who was nearly killed was a Dorward—Gregory Dorward—the very name of the boy who has been such a caution to us here. That’s what I can’t quite make out.”

“Why?”

“They’re all one gang,” he replied. “There’s a scheme in it, and I can’t see to the bottom of it.”

“You will to-morrow, perhaps, when your head’s clearer.”

"Fanny, I haven't been drinking," he murmured reproachfully.

"No, but you're muddled in mind," Mrs. Fretwell remarked; "you always are, Felix, when you've anything to bother you."

"It's enough to bother anybody," he grumbled. "Why did he pretend to ask my advice as to the worst boy, and know all along which boy he wanted to see? That was clear humbugging. That was all his infernal artfulness."

"Yes, I think it was," assented Mrs. Fretwell.

"But I'll be even with him," exclaimed the master. "I have sent to have Greg searched, and make sure nothing has been passed to him. And to-morrow I'll write to the Board, and tell them the cheque I have forwarded is probably worthless."

But the morrow proved that John Woodhatch's contribution to the funds of the reformatory was perfectly genuine and was duly honoured by John Woodhatch's banker. Mr. Fretwell forwarded to Mr. Woodhatch an official receipt with the thanks of the Board, which had not been grateful for Mr. Fretwell's

vigilance, and had only replied to it in this way: "Permit Mr. Woodhatch to visit the Reformatory at any day and hour he may select, and afford him all the information that he may require as to the character of the boys, and the general working of the Institution."

"He has a friend at court; that's pretty certain, Fanny."

And it *was* pretty certain that he had, assented his pale wife.

Well, it was no business of the master's, after this; he had done his duty, and there was an end of it, so far as he was concerned. At least, Felix Fretwell thought there would have been an end, only his besetting weakness was curiosity, and there *was* something very remarkable in the interest shown by John Woodhatch for that troublesome specimen of boyhood, designated "Greg."

"All one gang, all a scheme of some kind," he muttered for days afterwards, and two or three times a day, John Woodhatch's mysterious movements being still upon his mind.

After all, he was a good servant of the institution, with a horror of being "done;" a suspicious man, as was natural, considering his

surroundings ; a trusty house-dog, short and sharp and faithful. Mr. Woodhatch had not taken him into his confidence, had not said what he was going to do with Greg Dorward ; and yet had permission from the Board to take the boy away and train him as he pleased. And the Board was aware that Mr. Woodhatch had been a disreputable character himself, and snubbed him, Felix Fretwell, when he quoted from the report-book a few of the grim antecedents of this new patron of the establishment.

He thought he would try and learn a little from Greg himself ; it was as well, perhaps, to try, in case of anything turning up presently, when he might be blamed. Hence, a week or fortnight afterwards, when Greg had sobered down and was sullenly doing his share of work, Mr. Fretwell attempted to glean a fragment or two of truth by cross-examination. It was in the airing-yard, when Greg was wheeling a barrow towards the storehouse, that Mr. Fretwell stopped him ; and Greg paused, touched his cap, and looked from under his brows at the master.

“ Well, Greg, your time is nearly up. Another six weeks and you are a free man.”



Greg nodded, and then, without a smile upon his thin face, grasped the handles of the barrow again. He did not like Mr. Fretwell, and he did not care to talk to him. He would rather work hard even—much as he hated work—than waste words and breath upon him at any time.

“Do you think Mr. Woodhatch will keep his word?” said Mr. Fretwell, as he walked on by Greg’s side.

The boy looked up again with his peculiar and furtive scowl and said—

“Who’s he?”

“The man who came when you were in solitary,” was the reply. “You know him well enough.”

“I never seed him afore—saw him before,” he added, correcting his English as he went on.

“And don’t want to see him again; eh, Greg?”

“I don’t care which it is, much.”

“You would have done better abroad with the other boys, possibly.”

“I ain’t agoin’ with any of *them*,” responded Greg, very decisively.

“No; you’re going with Mr. Woodhatch.

That's arranged ; and I think you're glad, after all."

" I haven't thought about it much ; only to wonder—— "

" Only to wonder ? " repeated Mr. Fretwell.

" What he wants with me."

" Oh, you think he wants something with you ? "

" You heerd him as well as *me*," said Greg, " and you know as much of him as *me*, Mr. Fretwell." And here his hands once more seized upon the barrow-handles ; this time with the evident intention of moving on at all hazards.

" I think I know a little more, Greg," replied Mr. Fretwell confidently, as he walked away ; and Greg trudged on with his barrow in a listless fashion, that was very natural to him of late days, and since his last fierce outburst. Greg had been very reflective for a week, and had thought a great deal more of John Woodhatch—whose name Mr. Fretwell had communicated to him for the first time—than he had cared to confess to anybody. He was as suspicious as the master, for he too believed that John Woodhatch's advent was

part and parcel of some plot which would be made clear to him when he was quit of this awful place for good. He did not believe in Mr. Woodhatch's little sermon, or his little story of his past—they were “in it” down in Drury Lane—they were all in it, father and mother and Kitty, and the whole lot of 'em, and this was a new one of the “school,” who could palaver and preach a bit. Blest if the bloke hadn't “bested” him with his talk, too, till he came to think it over word by word, and saw how “fly” the man was. There would be a good screamer on presently, when they all had the chance to scream; and, at all events, he was not to be sent out of the country. He, thank his stars, was going back to the streets. He was good for nothing; there was no chance of his turning out anything better than he had been, than he was now. He did not want to be better; he hoped even to be much worse, only with more luck on his side in dodging the peelers, curse 'em!

Woodhatch had come from Kitty, too—he had said so; he had whispered in his ears that fact, and it had quieted him. For, after all,

he did like Kitty a good bit; Greg didn't know why, he had never thought why, except that she was a trifle worse than himself, and more "spry" altogether.

Kitty had remembered him and was waiting for him outside, and there would be a rare spree in Bolter's Rents when he had served his time out, and the old woman had sent round to the Feathers for gin to drink good luck to him from that day, and the old man had drunk his health and been a bit friendly too, not having clapped eyes on him or thrown his boots at him for four years.

Four years ! That was like yesterday to Greg Dorward, recking not of the changes for good or for evil, from day unto night, and, God be thanked, from the black night unto day sometimes, which four years may bring to suffering humanity. Recking not of anything but himself and of the shadow-land into which he should vanish again and be lost.

"Lost !"

## CHAPTER V.

## GREG IS FETCHED.

It grew close upon the time when Greg Dorward was to go away—when the order would come down from the Home Office to set this waif free, and let him face the world again with all the good precepts which had been given him in the reformatory to profit by, and all the good teaching also—moral and physical and intellectual—which had been hammered at him, rather than into him, during the last four years to take to heart.

The Reverend Athelstan Cream, a meek, pious, absent-minded man, whose intentions were of the best, but whose mind was of the flabbiest, secured the opportunity—or rather put out two fingers placidly and touched the opportunity—to give Master Greg, going out into the world, a lecture on his duties

and responsibilities. Greg tried to listen, and thought how well Mr. Woodhatch had humbugged the parson as well as everybody else.

"It's a fine chance for you to do well, Dorward, if you act well," said Mr. Cream, after a long address bristling with Bible texts.

"Yessir," said Greg Dorward in reply.

"And you'll like it, I think—having a master over you who can understand and sympathize with you; at least, I suppose he can. It will be honest, if hard work, and keep you healthy, body and soul, Greg; at least, it ought to do so."

Hard work! Greg had not heard anything about hard work before, and he had had a strong objection always to hard work, which had never agreed with him, he was certain. Part of the "plant," he supposed; so he said "Yessir" again as if he perfectly understood what the parson was "jawing him" about, which he did not—not a blooming word!

In the big dormitory he lay in his narrow bed and thought this over between whiles; between the remarks of the other boys who were not going away just yet, and were envying Greg's chance, and Greg's next step "out of it." Every one knew Greg's time was up,

and there was no one glad or sorry about it, so far as regarded Master Dorward personally; for Greg had not won to himself any kind regard. There would be no wet eyes or trembling lips when he went from them; he had been "a bad lot," and was no more liked by the boys than the masters; he had been a trouble to both, and he had liked no one in his turn. Yes, this would be flinty material to work upon and to strike light from—even one faint spark would be a hard task for John Woodhatch to obtain, sanguine as he might be as to the result of his experiments, and having tremendous faith in himself and his theories.

The boys were full of excitement the night before Greg's departure, and could not sleep. They could do little else save talk,—for Greg was going away to-morrow, and Mr. Fretwell having told Greg he was to be fetched in the morning, Greg was not sleepy either. He was inclined to be less sullen, probably under the pleasurable consciousness of the great change awaiting him, and though his hated foe Barnaby—a youth who had arrived late in the day at Fretwell's school, and had grown

a big-whiskered, lumpy, stubbly lout—lay a few beds off and aggravated him by prophesying, in a sepulchral voice, that he was going away to be a bigger thief than ever, and to be finally hanged “off the reel.” “Which would be a good job too,” added Barnaby, with a hoarse croak.

“Ah! yer won’t rile me to-night,” said Greg. “I’m quit o’ yer, Barnaby—and you’ll have to do my dirty work here, whilst I’m living like a genelman outside. Do yer hear?—outside of this!”

“I’d strangle you for two pins, and afore you got outside that bed even,” growled Barnaby.

“Oh! but yer durstn’t.”

“Silence, you boys!” called one of the masters from the next room, shut off by a long glass window from the big dormitory. “Can’t you do anything but talk to-night?”

They could not, but they did not answer in the negative. Greg Dorward was going away—there would be no more chopping of wood, carrying of burdens, blowing through brass instruments, grinding at lessons; it was all over for him, lucky dog; whilst they would



chop, carry, blow, and grind for all eternity, it seemed, reckoning the years before them slowly and with every hated minute like a year. They were full of odd wishes, too—one youth trusting fervently that Greg would be struck dead before the morning, so that he could not get “out of it” after all. It was only Crapper, the porter of the establishment, and close on liberty himself, with Canada before him for a future, who jerked out something about “luck,” and wished Greg might get his share of it. “Though I can’t say as how you deserve it,” added Crapper, punching his pillow emphatically, and trying if he could sleep on “his other side” in spite of the mutterings of his contemporaries.

Greg watched the morning come upon him, brightening the window-blinds and making the rows of pallid faces paler still, and then he dozed off and dreamed of the freedom that was close upon him. And that would be, he knew, so different from that which these duldards had been fancying. Freedom in Bolter’s Rents, and with Kitty and him together, too!—Kitty, who had sent John Woodhatch to him. He awoke to find the boys dressing themselves

hurriedly for the business of the day, and he knew that he had not to rise at a quarter to six for lessons any more, by the way the master looked at him through the glass of the room beyond, by the boys scowling and sighing and not asking him to get up, by the new clothes at his bed's foot, and the new little pocket Bible on the top of them. The boys filed away, and left him there to the empty cots and the scriptural texts upon the walls, and the teacher came from his apartment, and rested his hand kindly upon the shock head of the youth he had not been able to tame.

"If I should not have another opportunity to say good-bye, Greg, I'll say it now," said Mr. Marks; "and I hope you'll be grateful for the chance which is to be offered you, and which many here would give half their lives to have."

Greg looked down, put his hand in the master's, and muttered his good-bye in response, not understanding anything about it still, and not caring very much.

"You'll get on, if you really try, for you're sharp enough, Greg,—everybody knows that," were the concluding words of Mr. Marks.

At eight o'clock Greg had his breakfast for the last time with the boys, at nine his small box was packed, and he was waiting. Waiting for the new life to begin, and the curtain to drop on the old. Waiting for John Woodhatch, and Kitty, and home—and such a home! Waiting in Mr. Fretwell's office away from the airing-ground and the boys, waiting to go away out of the front door like a tiptop swell. Waiting for what he did not understand, and had not in any way bargained for—waiting for the unknown.

At eleven o'clock to the minute, a four-wheeled cab with luggage on the roof drove up to the reformatory, and Mr. John Woodhatch stepped out and came with long strides up the path.

“I think I'll tackle him, Fanny, about his artfulness the last time he was here,” said Mr. Fretwell, as he and his wife, standing at the window, took stock of the visitor's arrival.

“What's the use?” said his wife. “He has talked over the Board, and they understand what he is about, if you don't.”

“They may,” replied Fretwell; “and if they do, all I can say is, they need not have

slighted me by keeping me in the dark. And I should like him to know that I haven't been deceived."

"You're such a worry, Felix," was his wife's comment here, as she went out of the room, leaving her lord and master to "tackle" the philanthropist, if he were minded so to do. John Woodhatch was shown into the room the instant afterwards; he had the same steady "quite uncomfortable" stare with him, which the master of the reformatory had thought last time to be particularly objectionable.

"He is ready, I hope," said Mr. Woodhatch.

"Yes, he is ready, sir."

"There is not much time to spare," remarked the new-comer, looking at his watch; "there is one of Greg's friends to see, and a train to catch."

Greg's friend, indeed! and a train to catch too. "Going into the country with him, then?" inquired Mr. Fretwell.

"Yes."

"You will excuse my asking these questions. I take a great liberty, you will think," he added satirically; "but I have been kept a little in the dark, for one who has had the

custody of the boy so long, and is, so to speak, naturally interested in the result."

"I am glad you are interested," answered John Woodhatch, "and are not going about this business like a machine, as I fancied you were last time I came. Here are some papers from head-quarters for you—your warrant for the dismissal of Gregory Dorward, and his consignment to me, and so forth."

"Thank you," said Mr. Fretwell, taking the papers and looking them carefully over. "I received most of my orders last night."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You are, I perceive, a farmer, resident in Lincolnshire?"

"Yes, that's it."

"And Greg?"

"Will be my farm pupil to begin with, or something of that kind."

"Well, if you teach him to work, you will have done what we failed in," remarked Mr. Fretwell, shrugging his shoulders; "for a more impracticable lad——"

"Yes, yes, I know that. Perhaps I fear that," he added; "but don't tell me anything more about him."

"I dare say you know more than I can tell you," said Mr. Fretwell, laughing, but not laughing pleasantly.

"What do you mean by that?" was the quick inquiry, and John Woodhatch's big grey eyes were not easy to confront now.

"I have been looking over the old records, and I see the name of Dorward was pretty familiar to you five and twenty years ago," explained Mr. Fretwell, letting him have it at last, as he told his wife afterwards.

"You keep your records well," John Woodhatch observed quietly.

"Yes."

"And you are quite right. I was tried for attempting the life of that boy's father."

"Yes; I know. I knew all along," Mr. Fretwell said, a little mendaciously, "that you were interested in the boy Greg—that it was a family affair; but I was curious to see how you would act. And you pretended not to know him."

"There was no pretence about it, sir," said Mr. Woodhatch, so sternly and sharply that Mr. Fretwell jumped back a step; "but I was not compelled to tell you all my business. It

was known at head-quarters, and that was sufficient."

"Very likely—very likely," answered Mr. Fretwell; "I am used to being passed over."

"I asked you which was the worst boy you had, but I knew you would show me Greg."

"Then why——"

"But if you had a worse, I should have taken him too."

"Having faith in the worst of everything—ha! ha!" said Mr. Fretwell. "Well, every man to his fancy."

"But my hands are pretty full now, and Greg is not the only one upon them."

"You don't mean that," said the master, surprised now.

"It is very possible I shall return here—that you will see me again and again. This is not the first one I have tried to snatch from the devil, but I make a mess of it at times, being," he remarked, almost sadly, "a clumsy beggar in many ways, and obstinate, and conceited, as are a good many more of us," he added, eyeing Mr. Fretwell, as if he included him also in the category.

"I think we'll have Greg Dorward in now," he added, after a moment's pause.

"I will send for him at once," replied Mr. Fretwell, ringing the bell.



## CHAPTER VI.

## "BOUGHT AND PAID FOR."

WHEN Greg Dorward came sidling into the room, he found Mr. Fretwell at the table, and the big man who had come to fetch him sitting facing the door, so that he could see him clearly as he entered, and be the first to see him too. Greg had expected that John Woodhatch would make a sign as he came into the room to put him on his guard in some way; but he did not. Mr. Woodhatch only regarded him sadly; and it was a "rum-looking cove," the boy thought, who sat there waiting for him—"a queer 'un, and no mistake."

"Well, Greg, this is an improvement on the last visit," said John Woodhatch. "You see, I have kept my word and come for you."

"Yessir," said Greg, touching the front

lock of his short hair, as he had been trained to do to all his superiors in this world; and everybody was superior to him except Barnaby, he thought. Barnaby was awful!

"I don't think there's anything more to say to you here; we can talk as we go along," said Mr. Woodhatch.

"Yessir," Greg responded for the second time.

"Bid Mr. Fretwell good-bye, then, and thank him for his care of you."

Greg looked from the speaker to the master of the reformatory, and then muttered, "Good-bye; thankee, sir," wondering at the same time what he had to thank him for, the fellow who had been always down on him.

"Good-bye, Greg," said Mr. Fretwell. "I won't say I'm sorry to part with you, but I will say I shall be glad to hear good news of you some day."

"Come and see how we get on for yourself. My home is in Lincolnshire; they will tell you where it is at the office," said John Woodhatch, "if you don't know already."

"Thank you, I am honoured," replied Mr. Fretwell, doubtful if he were pleased or not

at the invitation, and therefore answering in a confused way.

“And you will see progress, I hope.”

Mr. Woodhatch shook hands with the principal, and they went out of the room into the hall, and from the hall to the street, where Master Crapper was assisting the cabman to put Greg's box upon the roof.

Crapper grinned at Greg, shook hands with him, and wished him good luck again, and then Greg and his new custodian were in the cab. The boy had glanced wonderingly at the luggage on the roof, and had been more perplexed than ever; but he waited for the explanation which he thought would follow immediately they were out of earshot of “Old Fretwell.”

But no explanation came. Mr. Woodhatch sat back in the cab thinking very deeply, looking gravely out of the cab-window into the street beyond, with his thoughts very far away.

“Where are we goin’?” asked Greg, “for I'm blest if I know.”

Mr. Woodhatch looked at his companion.

“We are going to Lincolnshire.”

“Really?”

"Yes, really."

"And where's that? And what's the good of goin'?"

"The good to you we've got to find down there, Greg."

Greg looked askance at his companion. A dim feeling began to oppress him that there was a mistake somewhere, and this man was not one of "the school." He felt his heart beat unaccountably fast too, which was a new sensation. He could almost fancy he was afraid of what was in store for him, even of what was coming next, and within the next few hours.

"Where did you say you were goin'?" he asked again.

"Lincolnshire."

"Who's there, then?"

"No one you know," was the answer. "But presently people to love and take example from."

"Oh."

"People who will try and put you in the right way, and——"

"Arn't any of the old 'uns a-comin'? The guv'nor, or the old woman?"

"No."

"Are they in quod?"

"Your mother is; your father is not strong enough to get out of doors just now."

"Ain't he, though? And—we ain't agoin' to see him?"

"He doesn't want to see you," was the reply; "he wants to be left alone."

"And does he want me to go with *you*?"

"Yes."

"And—and Kitty? Where the devil's she got to?" Greg asked snappishly.

"You will see her shortly. She will meet us at the Great Northern."

"Is she coming to Lincolnshire, too?" exclaimed Greg, his face suffused with a sudden glow, and his small dark eyes taking fire into them very quickly.

"No," answered John Woodhatch.

"Here, lookee here, now," exclaimed Greg, "is this a dodge, or isn't it? What's the game? What do yer want to do with me? How do yer know anythink about Kitty—how did yer find out about her—what's it all mean? What's up?"

"Well, we had better clear the ground as

we go on," said Mr. Woodhatch. "Listen to me."

Then, as the cab rolled along, John Woodhatch made matters somewhat clearer—but after all, and to this dazed youth, not particularly clear. For the mists were about Greg Dorward, and he did not see his way through them.

John Woodhatch sketched his own life briefly—and as it is a reflex of the report-book of the reformatory, we need not dwell upon it here. He said he had been like unto Greg, and that was enough; he had been worse than Greg even, and had stood a chance of receiving a long sentence of penal servitude, had it not been for the jury that took a merciful view of things, and a lenient judge, who, taking into account the great provocation the boy had received, and considering his youth—he, who was old in sin, and felt like an old man—had let him off lightly by consigning him to a reformatory for four years.

"So you see my life has been like yours, and yet here I am, hale and strong and well-to-do, and honest. Honest, Greg—and proud of it, very."

Greg listened, but he did not reply. He was not quite certain that it would not have been as well to go to Canada; there would have been some fellows like him—some fun going on—some life! But this—and with this man! Dashed if he could make out how it would end. And dashed if he could see how it had all come about. And dashed if he would stand it, and be led anywhere this bloke chose to take him, and who was nothing to him, and who had no power over him if he did not care to go. He'd tell him so presently, he thought; and then the big man suddenly launched into the history of Greg's father, and what a scamp and brute he was, and how he, John Woodhatch, stabbed him one night in his awful rage, intending to "do for him" then and there, and end it altogether.

"When I came back from Canada," he concluded, "my first visit was to Bolter's Rents, to see what could be done, and who was left, and what had become of your father. He was living, a very feeble man, and very wretched in his feebleness; he had recovered my attack, and had married a young woman some years afterwards." A nice young woman, Mr.

Dorward had intimated to his visitor, if it wasn't that she drank, and got clumsy with her fingers, and was found out with other people's property attached to them. Hence bad luck, and cumulative sentences, and Mr. Dorward senior left very much alone, and with a boy, "young Greg," to mind, and to kick and swear at, and train up as he should not go, as he, John Woodhatch, had been trained in the old bad days, and until the HANDS OF JUSTICE—strong, hard hands that clutched tightly at the victim and held him in their iron grip—had turned the key upon him and shut him up out of the way. "Therefore," he concluded, "your young life and my past youth are the same pattern, boy. I see in you *myself*—and I want to make something of you. Partly because I might have killed your father—partly because I want to try what I can do, after my own plan."

"And what does the gov'nor say, sir? He don't want me to go along o' yer?"

"Yes, he does."

"What, the old 'un! The old daddy himself—Daddy Devil?"

"Yes, Daddy Devil."



John Woodhatch did not tell Greg that he had purchased all rights in him—bought him like a freehold, or a copyright “out and out,” for a sum very much in excess of what he was worth, and for which Mr. Dorward senior, generally known in Bolter’s Rents as Daddy Devil, was exceedingly obliged, and would have parted with his soul—had the beast of a thing been a marketable commodity!—for a similar amount, or even half as much. He was grateful to Mr. Woodhatch now—glad that Mr. Woodhatch some nine and twenty years ago had very nearly killed him, for that little affair had kept his memory green, and had now brought him money and lots of drink, until Mrs. Dorward could come out and do business again on the family’s account.

“Yes, yes,” said Greg, “but I don’t want to hear about him. Where’s Kitty. You don’t say anything about her?”

“She is of the same mind as the rest. She wants you to come with me.”

“Kitty does!” he said with a half-scream.

“Yes.”

“And she to stay away—here in Drury

Lane—and me with yer! Has she heerd all *that?* "

"Yes," said Mr. Woodhatch again.

"And me in the country. What's country? Like the common outside that place?" he said, jerking his head backwards, and implying the reformatory.

"It's quiet, and there's room and peace," said Mr. Woodhatch, solemnly; "and the sea washes the banks of the fields, and says, 'Work; be like my own mighty self, never still!'" "

Greg looked askance at him again. He was frightened of him, for John Woodhatch was mad, he was sure; yes, very mad, to take care of him, or think he could make any good out of him at any time, in any way!

"And Kitty," Greg said again—"I'm sure to see her, then. At the railway station, did yer say?" "

"Yes."

"Kitty—at the station. Has she growed much?" "

"I don't know. I saw her twelve months ago for the first time."

"Oh, did yer?" "

"Your father spoke of her, and then I found her out."

"What did yer want to——"

"And I took an interest in a desolate, pitiful life, as I take an interest in yours, Greg. And I shall save her too."

"Oh, Lord! yer are a save-all," muttered Greg.

"And she will see you at the station; and one day, later on, you and she will meet again. It is all arranged."

Once more Greg Dorward bestowed a furtive look—half suspicious, half fearful this time—on the speaker. What was arranged? and who was the man to arrange everything, and talk like a God Almighty about him and Kitty?

"What's she doing?" asked Greg.

"You want to know too much."

"What's she doing now?" he asked again, almost peremptorily.

The large hand of his companion was pressed upon his arm.

"She's doing well, I hope," was the reply.

Greg did not ask any more questions; it was no use. He did not understand the answers;

everything was a puzzle to him, and he should make a bolt away from all this business at the first opportunity. Of that he was as sure as sudden death!

The cab carried him along, silent and wondering, and John Woodhatch sat by his side, silent and wondering too. Through London, to the Great Northern Railway, where the boxes were handed down by the busy porters, and "Where to, sir?" was asked; a question at which Greg Dorward, ever on the alert, pricked up his ears.

"Skegs Shore," said Mr Woodhatch.

Greg looked wildly round him. To the mind of his companion, this was the boy coming from his "solitary" into the light a few weeks since, and Woodhatch took him by the wrist, as though he were a child he might lose. It was a hand that held like a vice.

"Let me go, guv'nor; I'm no use to yer," he murmured.

"You will be."

"Let me get away; for Gord's sake let me go back to 'em all," pleaded Greg, looking very white and scared. It was a new prison he was

going to ; he knew it was nothing better than that.

“ Quiet, Greg. Let us come and see Kitty now ; she wants to see you very badly.”

“ Where is she ? ”

“ In the waiting-room.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE NEW KITTY.

GREGORY DORWARD and John Woodhatch walked side by side along the platform, and into the general waiting-room of the Great Northern Railway, Greg asking no more questions, caring for no more answers, waiting now for results as the better and clearer way of arriving at the facts.

When they were in the waiting-room, John Woodhatch said, "Here she is;" and Greg looked around eagerly, scanning quickly every face in the big room and seeing no one like her.

"It's all a sell,—ain't it?" he asked of his new master.

There were some ten or twelve persons in the room: a clergyman, three farmers, four commercial gentlemen burdened with port-

manteaus, rugs, and all kinds of odd things strapped together ; a husband, wife, and baby—the husband nursing the baby, and the wife asleep ; a horsey man in tight leggings and reading the *Sportsman* ; two old ladies in spectacles, prim and angular, and in a state of suppressed excitement as regarded the next train, which was to take them from the roar and bustle of the wicked city into their own peaceful village, five miles from anything with life in it ; and a tall girl neatly dressed in black, who was knitting something dexterously and swiftly as if in a hurry to complete her task, or terribly alive to the value of time and the sin of wasting a minute of it.

“ It’s no sell, Greg,” answered John Woodhatch ; “ look again.”

Greg took a second survey of the tall girl, at the same moment as she looked up, turned pale, reddened very much, and then turned white again. Presently—it seemed a long while to Greg, but it was only one minute of time by the big clock in the waiting-room—she started and came towards them slowly, even timidly, and with the face not brightening, only betraying a painful interest in him,

and the eyes staring at him, as at a being whom it was also difficult to recognize.

Neither boy nor girl had taken into account what changes four years might have made in their lives, and in their outward and visible aspect. They were between twelve and thirteen years of age when the law had stepped between them and set them apart; now Greg was a youth, for the present, smart and trim, and she, a few months older than Greg, was "quite a young woman," and taller than he, by three inches at least. She had been growing,—there was no mistake about that. Gosh! she had done nothing else but grow, if this was Kitty, thought the waif.

If it could really be Kitty:—Kitty "toggled out," and not Kitty's ghost, and with only a faint likeness of the old Kitty left. He had seen her last in Bolter's Rents—he and she, and the old man and his mother, and four lodgers and one or two kids, had been all asleep together on the second floor back of No. 121, when the police had called for him and taken him away, and Kitty had screamed and scratched and fought like "a good 'un," whilst the others lay shivering with fright—



and that was the last he had seen of her, raving and defiant and *drunk*. Yes, drunk as a lord! He remembered it well, for he had supplied the drink—"drinks all round!"—having been in luck's way early that evening, outside a photographer's shop in the Strand, where his mother had taken him to see the pictures, and the backs of the gentlemen who were looking at them, and who had pockets behind to their coats, and things in their pockets worth collecting. And by the aid and guidance of his mother he had been particularly lucky that evening, until it had got very late, and the police suddenly and rudely had called at Bolter's Rents and seized him. He was a very "queer kid" then—smaller than his years warranted, and looking unlikely to last more than a year longer—hence a light sentence from the magistrate, and afterwards the reformatory for four years as a wind-up, and a public outcry against the mother who had taught him theft as a "good business!" Four years and some odd months ago—a long lifetime to Greg, shut away from the Rents; and this the end of it, or, the beginning of something new and strange, and

AWFUL. And this Kitty Vanch, grown out of all knowledge, and with shoes and stockings on, and a clean white face, and dressed "to rights," and with only two great hazel eyes to remind him of the ragged, street-stained, wild cat who had been fond of him! Didn't they call him in Bolter's Rents "Kitty's bloke"—and yes, of course, *he was*—and didn't it get into the papers? Why, Barnaby told him all about it when *he* came in, and what a row there was in print, and what a lark they made of it, Drury Lane way, where girls and blokes were plentiful! And Lord's truth, this was Kitty, then!

John Woodhatch stood a little aside to watch the strange meeting of the pair—to wonder what were the feelings of each, to note that both were scared, to see that each glanced timidly towards himself who had played, or tried to play, the part of saviour to them, and who doubted, in one case at least, what would be the end of it.

"Shall I leave you two?" he asked of the young woman.

"No; don't go away altogether, sir," was Kitty's quiet reply. And Greg Dorward did

not even know the voice. It had been a sharp, strong yell at times in Bolter's Rents, and indeed was always shrill and overstrained; now it was soft and subdued, and trembling, and wholly new to her listener. "Greg!" she said, holding out her hands to him, "do you think you recollect me?"

"Yes—now I do. A'most!" he answered.

He shook both her hands timidly. Dashed if he wasn't afraid of her too. He must be "going off his nut," he thought!

"And you have altered very much. In the streets I should not have known you anywhere—shouldn't have guessed it was you. And you would have passed me fifty times, Greg—wouldn't you? Isn't that true?"

The girl spoke with an astonishing rapidity—wholly new to her manner in all Greg's experience of her—with a new accent and tone, and with all the slang of the Rents and the oaths of the Rents gone for ever from her. Greg stared and nodded, but he could not speak a word further at present. It was a blessed nightmare, he thought—that's what it just was!

"Four years ago—four years!" continued

Kitty. "Why, that's a tremendous time, Greg, and it's only a year since that I was any better—one pin better—than when you left me. But then he came—see, this man," and she suddenly stepped back and put both her hands upon those of John Woodhatch, which were crossed upon his stick, "and he took me away altogether from *them*. He saved me somehow, that is, if I am ever to be saved. God knows; I don't! If I——"

"Hush, Kitty!" said Mr. Woodhatch, gravely; "this is not the time to talk of that. You are saved from Bolter's Rents, at all events."

"Yes—yes, that's true."

"You would not go back there?"

"Rather into my coffin, at any time," was the firm, quick answer, as the lips closed firmly too. "So help me——"

"Yes, yes. You hear, Greg, what she says. You see," added Mr. Woodhatch, "how easy it is to hate the old bad life."

But Greg did not see anything clearly. With time before him, perhaps he would—they were all too quick upon him now. He should know better presently—he knew nothing

yet. He glanced once more at the last speaker, but did not answer him. It was beyond his power to answer him.

"I will leave you to talk to him, Kitty, whilst I get the tickets," said Mr. Woodhatch—"to take care of him," he added, meaningly.

"He will not run away," replied Kitty, confidently. "He would be a big fool if he did; and Greg never was a fool, sir."

"I am glad to hear that. One can jog on with anybody who is not positively a fool," said John Woodhatch, as he went away to get his tickets for Skegs Shore.

After he had gone, however, it was not quite so certain that Greg Dorward was to be trusted to remain till his return; though, if Greg fled now, he should be never aware of what he was running from, and upon what good luck he might be turning his back. He looked to right and left of him with a scared, even hunted expression; but Kitty took no heed of this.

"Let us walk up and down the platform, Greg, till he comes back," she said; and then Greg and she went slowly out of the waiting-room. "He will not be long."

"I don't care if he never comes back. What the——"

"You will learn to trust him, Greg," she interrupted quickly—"even to love him for his care of you. Oh! you don't know him yet. He will change your whole life as he has changed mine; he will put you in good hands, see after you himself, alter it all, Greg. Don't you understand?—can't you make it out?"

"No; and I don't want to. I——"

Again the girl ran on, not allowing him to finish, but rattling on in a quick, impetuous way, which was difficult to follow.

"I can't explain, I haven't time, and he will do it so much better; and you can trust him, Greg, always. Whatever he says he will do for you, he'll do it. He's rich, he's strong, he understands you and me. He was one of us; that's where it is; you'll see the truth of it. Why, haven't I?—all in a year, too! Oh, my God! Greg, the blot I was before this year; you know, you guess! I mightn't have been as bad as some of 'em, but I was awful bad. But, there; it has all gone, every bit of it; I'm sure of it, quite sure! Don't you understand now?"

"No, I'm damned if I do," muttered Greg, unmoved by all his companion's excited rush of words.

Kitty Vanch wrung her hands together, doubling her knitted work into a ball.

"I thought you wouldn't," she cried. "I told him it was no use my coming, but he said it was."

"Yer didn't want to come, then?"

"No. I was afraid."

"Yer didn't care to see a cove?" asked Greg, almost reproachfully.

She hesitated. "No; not yet I didn't. I wanted to wait."

"What for?"

"To see what he could make of you—what we should both be like in a year more. But he said——"

"Well, what did he say?" asked Greg impatiently as she paused.

"That he thought a word from me might put you straight a bit until you knew him better; that you might see how I had altered, how I was getting further and further away from Daddy, and your mother, and all of 'em," she cried; "getting clear away from the

Rents, away from it all, Greg; every scrap of it!"

"Away from me?" muttered Greg.

"Yes, you with all the rest, until you've altered with me; although I wish you luck, Greg, and shall be glad one day to see the luck for myself—one fine day when you and I are man and woman, perhaps," she went on. "But I don't know—I can't say; I've not settled down yet. See how wild I am to-day."

"Kitty, let's cut and run from it. It's all no use. Let's hook it now!" cried Greg, full of excitement at last, and at the prospect of going his own way.

Kitty stared at him, and then answered bluntly—

"No, Greg; not *me*!"

"What's the good of goin' on like this?"

"See what it's like, and then run away; not before. And, anyhow, I shan't run with you," said Kitty.

"Oh, you're a good 'un, now!" cried Greg ironically.

"No; only trying to be good; only trying to keep my word to him."



"Cus him!" growled Greg.

"God bless him!" came Kitty Vanch's response, and in defiance of Greg's malediction on the would-be benefactor.

Before her companion could say another word John Woodhatch was standing by their side.

"I did not expect you would leave the waiting-room," he said. "I began to wonder whether you had both run away."

"He asked me, but I wouldn't go," said Kitty at once.

"Good girl. No; I think you would have served me better than that, Kitty," he replied.

"And so will Greg when he gets older, when he is with you altogether."

"Ah! I don't despair," was the answer. "Come, Greg, the boxes are in the train. Bid Kitty good-bye."

"Where's she going, then?"

"Not with us. A long, long way from us," answered John Woodhatch.

"Where?"

"You will know in time. You will see me again," answered Kitty.

"I don't want ever to see yer—no more," muttered Greg.

"That may be as well," murmured Kitty.

Then she put her knitted work into his hand, said "Good-bye," and stood a few paces back, looking thoughtfully at him, even wonderingly, as at a new problem of life which God's Hand had not worked out for her.

"What's this here?" asked Greg curiously.

"A little purse I have been knitting for you. Won't you keep it, Greg, for my sake?"

"What's the good of——"

"He will keep it, Kitty," answered John Woodhatch; "it will be handy to hold the money he is going to earn along with me."

"Money!" muttered the lad.

It was the first sensible word that had been spoken. Greg understood what money meant, and what it could do even for him.

John Woodhatch and Greg Dorward entered the third-class compartment of the train, where were other travellers bound northwards; Kitty standing at the back of the platform, amongst the advertisement-boards, a pale and

patient watcher. Greg glanced once towards her, only once, as the whistle of the engine sounded, and the train began to glide slowly away from her, and from the London streets, where he had lived all his life till shut away in the reformatory with other black sheep like unto him. Kitty did not smile farewell at him ; only looked gravely, wistfully at him, and the departing train. It was a face he bore in mind, that for a while seemed to haunt him at Skegs Shore ; that was not like the face he had known at Bolter's Rents, or any face he had ever looked at yet.

This was the end of the first act of Greg Dorward's life. What was to follow it, he could not guess. Greg only felt he was trapped like a rat, and that at present John Woodhatch had mastered him, "collared him," and hustled him away. Skegs Shore was another prison he was being carried to, nothing better or brighter or happier than that ; and Bolter's Rents was very hard to part with !

**BOOK THE SECOND.**

**FARM FORLORN.**



## CHAPTER I.

### “THE END OF IT.”

THERE was not much conversation exchanged between John Woodhatch and his *protégé* during the long journey to Skegs Shore. Both were full of thoughts of their own, and disinclined to talk—or else Greg was disinclined, and the man in charge of him was wise enough to see that he was better left to himself. There would be time enough to talk, by-and-by.

Greg fell asleep at last; he had passed a restless night yesterday wondering what would be the end of it, speculating on a very different sequel—or a very different beginning again—and there was still so much to wonder at that his head ached and he went off finally into a deep slumber, with his mouth open and his head all on one side till it lunged forward

against John Woodhatch's broad chest, where it reposed at last, as though he loved John Woodhatch and was only happy near him.

The remaining occupants of the carriage looked from Greg's pinched face to the stern, bronzed face of his protector.

"He seems tired out," said a motherly old lady with a basket.

"Yes; he's tired."

"Been ill, perhaps?"

"No."

"He looks sadly, to be sure."

"Yes—he is not strong," assented Mr. Woodhatch.

"The country air will bring him round a bit, I dare say."

"I dare say it will;" and then, to cut short further questionings, John Woodhatch closed his eyes and pretended to sleep also, which would have been a difficult task, with Greg's hard, hot head driving all the buttons of the waistcoat into his chest. Still he made no effort to move Greg from the affectionate position the lad had assumed; he was very careful of him, and afraid of waking him by so much as a movement. Greg wanted rest;

it was the ordeal of the journey, with the uncertainty of what was at the journey's end which was disturbing Greg—let him sleep some of that away, thought Mr. Woodhatch.

It was a long journey down to Lincolnshire, but Greg slumbered through the greater part of the distance ; even when the train stopped at Peterborough and again at Spalding he only opened his eyes dreamingly as passengers stumbled over his feet, and then dozed off again. At Boston it became necessary to alight and to await the coming of another train, which would presently lead them away on a branch line to a station within a couple of miles of home. The train was not in any way arranged to meet the one which had thus far rattled them into the heart of Lincolnshire — Skegs Shore being in an out-of-the-way corner of the country, with nobody living there of any consequence to run trains for. Many trains passed Skegs Shore steaming away to Great Grimsby and elsewhere, but there were only two all day to stop at the station and land passengers, and one of them stopped by signal only, the chances being about ten to one against anybody wanting to get out.



Therefore it happened that John Woodhatch had time upon his hands as well as Greg Dorward,—time for refreshment in the town, and a glance at the shops and at the people tramping by in a big market-place, which was on the eve of shutting up for good, now that the day's business was at an end.

In the market, people seemed to know John Woodhatch very well, and many of them touched their hats to him, while others came and shook him by the hand, and talked in a broad dialect that was entirely incomprehensible to Greg, who made one or two efforts to understand it before giving it up in despair. There was some talk about market prices, and corn, and horses and bullocks; but they all talked rapidly and thickly, and Greg grew bewildered, wished he was in the train again, going on and on to the end of it. If he could only get to the "end of it," and know the worst or best of it, he thought, that was all he wanted now.

But he was not approaching the end of it till nearly nightfall. It was the dusk of twilight when they stepped into a creaking, lumbering old train—struck off years ago

from the main-line traffic, on account of its disreputable appearance,—bound for Skegs Shore ; it was the darkness of night when they were nearing their journey's end, with the flakes of fire from the engine driving past the windows like a red-hot rain.

He must have slept again, for he suddenly found John Woodhatch standing up in the carriage putting on a thick greatcoat, though it was August weather, and one or two other passengers looking for their small bundles and boxes which they had brought into the carriage with them. Before Greg had done rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, the train had slackened speed and stopped, and voices, husky with the night air, were crying out, " Skegs Shore."

" Now, youngster, here's the last stage," said Woodhatch ; and then he and Greg stepped from the carriage on to the platform of a little station lighted by oil lamps, which were struggling to keep alight in the teeth of a sharp wind, which had got at the flame behind the glass and was puffing at it mercilessly. It was very dark beyond the station—a dense thick blackness which hid even the white,

winding high-road beyond, and was relieved only by a fleck of light here and there from the windows of half a dozen cottages heaped together a hundred yards away. The few passengers who had got out with John Woodhatch and Greg melted away into the darkness; the boxes of the travellers were pitched on to the gravel; the engine shrieked farewell at them and started off on its journey further north; and a grey-whiskered man, who was station-master, booking-clerk, and signal-man rolled into one, was left to represent authority, and to hope, very civilly, that "Mister Woodhatch" was all the better for his journey up to town.

"Yes, I think I am, Mr. Halden," was the reply. "Have you seen Fladge with the trap?"

"Oh yes, Fladge is outside, trust *him*. And Spikins has brought a cart to carry the boxes, and all the presents from London, eh, Mr. Woodhatch,—he, he, Mr. Woodhatch!" piped the station-master. "You'll find them both in the road, yonder."

"That's well," said Woodhatch. "Come, Greg."

Greg, almost too tired to wonder now at anything, slouched after his custodian, and in the darkness outside the little rustic railway station he found a chaise and a light cart waiting, each in charge of a shadowy figure, who set up something between a laugh, a shout, and "A good day to ye," which rose the echoes of Skegs Shore, and was significant of satisfaction at the return of the master into Lincolnshire.

"Well, Spikins—well, Fladge—all right at head-quarters?"

Spikins, an old man, with a head unpleasantly bent forward as though preparing for the headsman's axe, said, "Ay, ay, sir, surely;" and Fladge, a very tall lanky youth of twenty, clapped both hands together, laughed heartily, and said, "Ay, ay, sir!" an octave or so higher.

Greg could not see anything to laugh at, and clambered into the trap at Mr. Woodhatch's invitation, slipping once off the iron step and coming into the dust of the road again, at which little bit of clumsiness Fladge, who evidently looked at everything in a comic light, roared with laughter again, to the

inward disgust of Gregory, who had shaken himself up and bitten his tongue.

John Woodhatch sprang to his side, seized the reins, whipped the horse, and drove off at a rattling pace, with Fladge sitting behind, or hanging on in extraordinary postures, as he answered the master's questions, and tried hard to get a clear view of Master Dorward, in whom he was intensely interested as a new-comer at the farm.

It was a very narrow road along which John Woodhatch drove at a great pace as though anxious to reach his journey's end, and probably only an accurate knowledge of the way hindered his landing himself and party in the wide deep ditch on one side, a small canal that had been cut deep into the soil when the great Fen land was drained some years ago. In the daytime, this portion of Lincolnshire country was flat and cheerless enough, with its long sweep of swamp land, arable land, and broad tracts of semi-bareness stretching far away to the sea, and ending in bristly banks of coarse grass and sand-drift. Now it was a broad, black desert, over which the wind was tearing and moaning like a fretful child—like a whole

legion of fretful children ; and beyond that, and above that, in the solemnity of natural forces which were abroad that night, there fell upon Greg's ears a deep, heavy, booming sound as of distant and regular cannon practice.

"What's that?" asked Greg, aroused at last into interest again.

"That's the sea," answered Woodhatch. "It breaks roughish on the shore to-night, Reuben."

"Ay, it do. It just do." And Fladge laughed so much at this new point of humour to his jocose mind, that Greg thought he would fall off his perch behind into the roadway.

"There must be rough weather a mile or two out."

"I should think there must be, master—ha, ha!" shrieked Fladge.

Greg looked in his old furtive way at Mr. Woodhatch to see if he were laughing also at some hidden jest, or double meaning, not perceptible to himself; and John Woodhatch caught his glance at once, being a man still watchful of him.

"He's always like that—nearly always,"

muttered John Woodhatch ; " but you'll soon like him, Greg."

" Oh ! shall I," said Greg, in doubtful answer.

" Honest, faithful, true as steel, but—wrong here a little bit," observed Mr. Woodhatch, touching his forehead with the handle of his whip. " And we're all wrong a little bit, wise folk say,—which accounts for a great deal. Which accounts for everything, nice and easily," he said, talking to himself rather than to Greg, although he added suddenly and loudly, " Which accounts for you and me, Greg."

" Yes," said Greg, for the want of a better response, " I s'pose so. But——"

" Well," said John Woodhatch, as he paused.

" Yours isn't a mad'ouse, is it?" he asked. " I ain't mad, am I—and they've sent me along o' yer, becos——"

John Woodhatch laughed at this new suspicion—and laughed heartily, and not at all like Mr. Fladge in the rear, who had heard Greg's startled inquiry, and joined in the hilarity also, but with a peacock's shrillness which was a trifle blood-curdling.

"No ; it's all right at the Farm."

"Shall we be much longer a-getting there?" asked Greg wearily.

"A quarter of an hour or so. I can see the lights across the flat."

Greg strained his eyes to pierce the darkness, but saw nothing. Having faith in his own young and strong sight, he did not believe that Mr. Woodhatch saw anything either, but was polite enough to refrain from saying "Yer a liar," although that was his full conviction after a moment's consideration of the subject.

"I was used to long stretches of land, before I settled down in Lincolnshire—when I was abroad. It was little that could escape me, night or day."

Greg did not respond. John Woodhatch had a "blessed good opinion of hisself," he thought; but that was like all on 'em, old Fretwell, old Marks, his old Daddy—Daddy Devil who had made him over to this man, and carted him away from Drury Lane sheer against his will. He believed all this was clear against the laws of his country, too, and as he grew older he'd find out. He was pretty sure it was kidnapping, for all John Woodhatch's



"big jaw" at him, and he would have the rights of 'em one of these fine days.

Poor Greg was going to a better life under protest,—and he had begun it, smarting with a sense of wrong. They had taken him away from the Rents—they had taken him away from Kitty; and the Lord knew what they had turned Kitty into, he didn't! and he did not believe he ever should. He was amazed, and, moreover, he was afraid,—but he was quite sure he should get the better of them presently, when he was used to it all, when he understood them and what was going on about them and him. Here his thoughts were interrupted by John Woodhatch.

"There will be no questions asked you at Farm Forlorn—that's the name my crib has been called for ages, Greg. You will be received as a friend, treated as a friend, trusted like a friend."

"Shall I?"

"And you will act like a friend," added John Woodhatch impressively; "do you understand?"

"Ye-es, I think I does," muttered Master Greg.

"That's well. 'No questions asked, and no questions to ask,' is the motto of the farm, which means, 'Mind your own business'—doesn't it, Greg?" asked the farmer cheerfully.

"Yes; but *they'll know?*" replied Greg.

"They'll know what?"

"Everythin' about me. Where I've come from, won't they?"

"No."

"They won't think I've come from boardin'-school, I s'pose," said Greg, with a little laugh at his own satire.

"They will not care where you came from; they will only say, 'Welcome; be one of us; rescued, like us, from the drift.' Do you see?" asked his companion eagerly; "do you guess now? They told me at the reformatory you were anything but dull."

Greg considered. The lights in John Woodhatch's home were still invisible to him, but the light upon his future life seemed twinkling faintly at him now from the murkiness ahead.

"There are other coves, then, who——"

"Who have been like unto you, poor lad,

and who will cast no stone. They have been all like you."

"All!" cried Greg, in his astonishment.

"Yes, and all working well for me; doing their best, and turning their backs upon damnation, as a bad-paying game. Isn't that true, Fladge?"

"Ho—ho! rather!"

"Is *he*, then?" asked Greg in a whisper, and with a backward jerk of his head.

"Yes."

"And that old man with the cart, comin' along with the luggage?"

John Woodhatch nodded again.

"And those we're a-comin' to, where the lights are? I see 'em now."

"Yes."

"It's another reformatory, then," said Greg, with a visible shudder. "I see the game now. Let a feller get out, and drown hisself in the water. I can't stand any more on it," cried Greg, very desperately; "and I won't stand any more on it."

Mr. Fladge, behind, laughed at this too; but John Woodhatch, ever watchful and considerate, as it seemed, said—

"It's not a reformatory, Greg ; and, hating it or not, you can leave it when you like."

"I—I can !" exclaimed Greg, in his intense astonishment.

"Yes, when you like. Why should I try to stop you ?"

"Why — yes — o' course not," answered Greg.

"The doors are open, there are no locks to them, and Crapper is not at the side gate, for ever on the watch," he continued. "I shall not lift a hand to stay you, Greg ; rather open the door for you very wide, and say, 'Go your way. You have had your trial, and are found wanting. There is the road to London and ruin ; or, if you prefer it still, there is the sea to drown yourself in ; and that I strongly recommend as a choice.' Do you understand John Woodhatch now, lad ?"

"No," answered Greg stoutly and frankly.

"We will leave it till—to-morrow."

"And if——"

"And if ?" repeated Mr. Woodhatch.

"And if I want to go back to London, will yer find the coin to send me back ?" asked Greg, as a new idea suggested itself to him

that he would not unpack, but take the first train home again in the morning.

Yes, Greg was not dull, thought John Woodhatch, who looked down into the dark gleaming eyes upraised to him.

"Could not you walk?" asked John.

"I'd rayther tramp it than——"

"Than stop," concluded John Woodhatch.

"Well, Greg, you need not trouble your mind about that. You can have the money to go back to Daddy Devil when you are tired of me."

"Thankee, sir," answered Greg, with more real gratitude than he had exhibited yet in return for all the trouble which John Woodhatch had taken.

Greg's mind was more at ease—even his hard little heart was easy. John Woodhatch was a more incomprehensible animal than ever—he did not make him out in the least—but it did not matter so that he was sure he was not a prisoner, and could go away when he liked, to-morrow if he liked—the big man with the red face finding the coin to get back, too, which was acting "like a brick." And precious soon he would be back, too, thought Greg;

catch him a-living at this dead-and-alive mad-house for anything or anybody.

There was no further conversation before Farm Forlorn was reached.

The subject was closed, explanations had been asked for and given, everything was satisfactory, and Greg Dorward was approaching the new life. The hedges seemed to grow higher on the road; there were rustling trees rising from them and casting a deeper shadow; one or two large dogs had sprung out suddenly, and were barking vociferously at horse and trap, and the legs of Reuben Fladge dangling from the back seat; there was a row of small houses to pass, sunken in the ground, or gracefully sinking through it, like a bit of stage scenery descending through a trap-slide, the roofs being level with the roadway, and the chimney-tops handy to the touch of passers-by—houses that were cowering out of the wind; and then there was the big old farmhouse before them, with its latticed windows full of cheerful light, with light streaming from the open door, with the ruddy gleam of a coal fire from the big bay window on the ground floor, and with the dim figures of many people

hovering in the roadway, and in the garden ground before the house, and under the big porch over which a very forest of ivy was trailing ; people who had turned out to welcome back John Woodhatch, and who were his retainers, friends and family—his family!—as though these were the good old times again, and John Woodhatch was a knight, or baron coming back from the Crusades. As he had, too, bringing one with him as a captive, willing or unwilling, in the shape of Gregory Dorward.

Greg looked down from his seat, holding in his hands the reins which Mr. Woodhatch had thrust upon him instinctively before leaping down. Greg surveyed the scene with a new interest now this was the end of it, and did not follow the farmer in his descent—being a little uncertain if he were not in charge of the sturdy roadster which had carried them homewards thus swiftly.

In the night shadows he could not see distinctly, for all the twinkling lights from the latticed casements. Amongst the crowd there were two or three whom Greg's quick gaze singled out from the rest, denizens of the new, strange world to be wondered at a little even

then—a man as tall as Woodhatch, gaunt and thin, who took the master by both hands, and shook them heartily, and said, "God bless ye, John; I'm right glad ye're back again." And a girl in white, with a straw hat shading a face he could not see, and who was the next to greet the master, in a rich, low musical voice of welcome, holding out both hands also, and to which John turned from his friends with eagerness, and a something like a happy cry at sight of her. And then a third greeting, before it was remembered that Greg was sitting on his perch holding the horse's reins; and this from a slight woman in black, with a shawl drawn closely over her head, and whose voice was resonant and harsh after the youthful tones which had preceded it.

"You are welcome back, sir," she answered almost reverently, stooping over the hand he had extended to her.

"Well, Mrs. Chadderton, home again it is," he answered cheerily.

"And the boy," she answered eagerly; "have you got him?"

"Hush!" he said quickly. "Yes; I have got him safe enough!"

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## CHAPTER II.

MRS. CHADDERTON.

GREGORY DORWARD was startled from his apathy by Mr. Woodhatch's last remark. Naturally suspicious—trained to be suspicious of everything and everybody, to be eternally watchful of his chances in “the open”—he was once more certain that he was the object of some deep-laid plan, which at present was an utter mystery to him. Greg did not believe in philanthropy, and indeed had not heard anything about it; humanity to him consisted of people who had been in prison, and people who had been lucky enough to keep out of prison; they were the two great classes, and as bad as one another. The lucky and the unlucky, nothing more. He had not known the difference between good or evil until he had got to the reformatory, and there they had preached at

him enough, and had puzzled him a great deal without impressing him in the least. And suspicion had grown with him there also. The boys by whom he was surrounded were all the same—all like him—and up to “every move on the board,” with just a few pretending to be sorry for the sake of favour from the minister, or good marks from Mr. Fretwell and his subordinates. He had been rebellious, and not too careful in disguising his dislike to those in authority, and hence he had become a black sheep, for ever under punishment—a boy despaired of, and pronounced “incurable”—a castaway in whom nobody had faith until John Woodhatch came upon the scene.

Greg had no faith in himself either, and when John Woodhatch announced what he was going to attempt with him, he had no faith in John Woodhatch. It was all “a dodge”—life was “a dodge”—and he was savage with himself because he could not guess what the dodge was about or likely to end in. This man who had appeared so suddenly before him was not one of “the school,” put on by Daddy Devil, or the old pals in Bolter’s Rents—put on by Kitty even; he had deceived him

at first into thinking that he was, and had dragged him off hundreds of miles from Drury Lane, and set him down in Lincolnshire—a horrible place, all wind and as black as a coal. And driving along that dark, dusty road, with the wind, to which he objected, almost blowing the teeth down his throat, Greg had been nearly imposed upon again by John Woodhatch's frankness and peculiar way of treating things.

And yet it *was* all "a dodge." John Woodhatch had not dragged him down here for love of him, or hope of him—with the idea of making a man of him, and a good man; he was only in league with the reformatory lot, and the prison lot, and the prison director lot, or else he was up to something on his own account which was not to be discovered yet awhile.

What did the little woman in black, whom the master had called Mrs. Chadderton, mean, by asking John Woodhatch "if he had got him?" and what did John Woodhatch mean by answering that he "had got him safe enough," if he, Greg Dorward, was not surely understood? Trust him for keeping his eyes

open after this, and finding out what it all meant for himself—he was not going to take John Woodhatch's word, or Kitty's word, or anybody's. Not he.

A man stepped forward and held the horse's head, and John Woodhatch said—

“ Here's home, Greg ; jump down.”

Greg tumbled rather than jumped out of the chaise, and landed himself on Fladge's feet, who left off laughing at last to howl. Greg joined the group outside the farmhouse doors.

“ A little friend of mine, Mr. Larcom, who is going in for farming,” said John Woodhatch to the tall man who had been the first to welcome back the master.

“ Let us have a look at him,” said Mr. Larcom, catching Greg immediately by the cap,—and with a good handful of Greg's hair inside the cap,—and twisting him round to the light from the farmhouse windows. “ Aw, John Woodhatch, here's work cut oot for ye here, I'm thanking. How old's the creature ? ”

“ Sixteen—or thereabouts.”

“ I've seen better sparcimens,” he added ; and though Greg wondered what the speaker meant by “ sparcimens,” he thought here was

another of the lot he should hate like poison. And a man with an uglier twist of the wrist he had never met, except it was a policeman he had known once in Drury Lane. This man, however, had almost broken his neck in trying to look at him, as if he could not have waited till they were all indoors. The girl in white approached her father, and regarded him also with strange interest, but did not speak—at least to him, although she whispered a few words to John Woodhatch about him, at which he laughed, and said, “Oh ! I am not afraid.”

The thin woman in black who had appeared to be expecting him, remained in the background until the farmer said—

“You might show our young friend his room, Mrs. Chadderton,—and, Fladge, you can carry up his box for him. By that time supper will be ready, I hope, for all our sakes.”

“This way, Greg,” said Mrs. Chadderton at once, and as if she had known him all her life ; and Greg followed her, still wandering on as if in a dream. No ; this was not the end of it—only the end of a journey which had cleared up none of the mists which surrounded him. Greg was sure of it, though he did not put his

thoughts quite into this form. It was "a plant" was Greg's opinion still, and probably it would take a great deal of time and patience to disabuse his mind of that idea.

He passed from the noise and bustle in the roadway, into the farmhouse,—into a big-roomed, stone-floored place with many corridors, and Mrs. Chadderton took a lighted candle from one of the maid-servants and went briskly up the stairs, followed by Greg, and with Fladge a step or two behind, bearing Greg's box on his shoulders. Mrs. Chadderton led the way from the first floor to the second, and through a labyrinth of passages strongly suggestive to the new-comer of Mr. Fretwell's establishment again, and came finally to a halt before a door at the end of the passage. She turned the handle and entered, Greg followed, and Fladge lumped down the box with a noise which shook the house, and then sat down and blew vigorously.

"This is your room," said Mrs. Chadderton.

There were three beds in it; and again Greg was reminded of his old dormitory, and looked round for the glass "inspection," through which the master watched his black

sheep night after night when the house was still, and the work was at an end. But that was missing, and the walls were full of cupboards, where a dozen people might be hiding and watching, for what Greg knew to the contrary.

"Who sleeps in *them* beds?" asked Greg at once, like a youth particular as to the company he kept.

Fladge answered for himself.

"I, for one," he said. "That's mine; this be yourn, Greg, near the door."

Near the door! All the better for that, thought Greg Dorward, his ideas running in one groove—that of getting away, and as speedily as possible, from Farm Forlorn. This was uppermost still, despite the confidence placed in him by John Woodhatch.

"You'd like a wash?" said Mrs. Chadderton, standing with a bunch of keys in her hand, and twisting them round and round in a mechanical manner. "You have come a long journey, Greg?"

There was no occasion to answer that question; the old woman knew he had come a long journey as well as he did; and as for

liking a wash—well, he never *had* liked washing, although there was always a fuss at the reformatory about soap and water, which he had known very little about until he had been introduced to the establishment; and then he had used them in silent protest against the ridiculous formality of keeping himself clean.

“All the way from London, the master tells me,” Mrs. Chadderton continued. “Ah, well, you’re better here than there, if you can make up your mind to think so.”

“I ain’t had time to think,” muttered Greg.

“I should have thought you had,” Mrs. Chadderton answered quickly.

Greg bestowed upon her one of his sidelong glances—born of looking sideways in the streets, where people might be looking for *him*—and wondered what she meant by that. Was she going to preach, too, like John Woodhatch—like old Cream at the lock-up house upon the Common? Was she one of the “psalm-smiters,” or one of the lot of which the farmer had spoken in the drive from Skegs Shore railway station? He did not know; he did not seem to know anything of anybody yet.



He had to keep his eyes open, that was pretty certain; even this old woman would be clean down his throat, if he didn't look sharp!

"This is a place where they don't ask questions Mister Woodhatch told me," said Greg, with withering satire.

"Did he tell you so?" rejoined Mrs. Chadderton very thoughtfully.

"Yes, he *did*," responded Greg with emphasis.

"Blest if he didn't," added Fladge, suddenly; "I heard him say myself——"

"Get out," said Mrs. Chadderton sharply.

Fladge, submissive to all authority, rose to his feet, and floundered backwards out of the room at once. Greg thought Mrs. Chadderton would follow Fladge, but she did not. She stood in the middle of the room, twisting the keys round still, and looking at the bunch as if for one in particular, which was to lock him in; and Greg took off his coat and began to wash, by way of a hint that it was now etiquette for a lady to withdraw. But Mrs. Chadderton made no movement to retire, and seemed perfectly unconscious she was in the way. Greg dried his face upon the towel, and looked

round odd corners of it at her during the process. Perhaps Farm Forlorn was a mad-house after all, and this was one of the mad ones! Perhaps he *was* mad himself, and had never been told so yet; they had driven him raving mad with rage once or twice at the reformatory, and locked him "in solitary" for safety and for punishment, where John Woodhatch had found him, first of all, he remembered. Perhaps Mother Chadderton was his keeper—how could he tell? He didn't like the looks of her, now he came to inspect her critically. She was very thin and bony, her face was white and full of hollows, with two dark eyes set so far back in her head, that a peculiar skeleton-like appearance was the result. They were very searching eyes, though, and stared unmercifully at Greg, who turned away at last, having an objection to be stared at.

"No; we don't ask many questions, and perhaps it is as well," said Mrs. Chadderton, after mature reflection upon Greg's last statement to her. "And I don't know that I have any questions to ask; but, as I am housekeeper here, I have one or two things to say."

Greg put his coat on again, turned down his

cuffs, and waited for the information which she was ready to impart.

"This is a place, Greg Dorward, where we don't stand any nonsense; and it's as well you should learn that quickly."

"How do yer know my name's Dorward?" asked Greg. "I never told yer; Mister Woodhatch never told yer."

"I know all about you," was the quick answer; "I knew you in Bolter's Rents years ago."

"Yer did!" said Greg in his amazement; "then yer one of the same lot."

"What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Chadderton.

"The master told me we were all alike here," answered Greg.

"The master's wrong. There's a difference between us; and there's more than one difference—the difference between good and bad, between heaven and hell," she cried with some excitement.

"And have yer——"

"I haven't come to talk about myself," she said, interrupting him; "only to let you know that you are here to work, not to play; to

learn how to get your living, and to be helped on in the world, if you have learned your lesson well. If not, to be kicked out," she added roughly.

"He may kick me out as soon as he likes," was Greg's immediate answer.

He had been a youth ever ready with his answers, which had often brought him into trouble at the establishment where they had endeavoured to educate him.

"I dare say that will be soon enough, then," she replied, regarding him curiously.

"Shouldn't be 'stonished if it was."

"You'll have your chance at any rate," remarked Mrs. Chadderton; "and then there will be nobody to blame but your miserable self. You will not be able to blame John Woodhatch."

"Who wants to?"

"You will be grateful to him, perhaps; many of them are; but then your name is Dorward."

"So yer've said."

"And a Dorward never came to any good—never did any good to anybody else—was never anything but a big black blight. So I told the master when he talked of bringing

you here—and so I tell you to your ugly face. Now come down to supper,” she added ; “the back room, mind—not where the master is. He’s had enough of you for one day.”

And with these uncomplimentary remarks, Mrs. Chadderton left him to find his way down to the ground floor as best he might.

### CHAPTER III.

#### IN THE CORRIDOR.

GREG thought over this short, sharp interview before he followed the housekeeper's last piece of advice, and arrived speedily at the conclusion that he should dislike Mrs. Chadderton very much indeed. He was an insolent being himself, always finding an immense difficulty in responding graciously to anything ; but the remarks of the housekeeper had jarred upon him, as well as perplexed him. He was " a big black blight," was he, and she told him that to his ugly face, did she ? And a Dorward never came to any good, nor did any good, she said, as if she had known all the blessed family. He should have hated Mrs. Chadderton like poison, if he had been going to stop at Farm Forlorn, which he wasn't. Catch him at that fun—oh yes !

He went downstairs, light in hand, after one critical survey of bed number three, which was for a third person who had not been introduced to him, unless Spikins was the missing party—and he quickly lost himself along the corridor on the first floor, which he had fancied was the basement of the house, and so had gone blundering along, wondering at last where he was and cursing the intricacies of the establishment into which he had been dragged. Presently he came upon a draughty window which was open, and through which the wind that had followed him all the way from Skegs Shore was rushing with uncomfortable coolness and keenness. As Greg passed, his candle was blown out, and he was left to grope the rest of his way in the darkness. There were no lamps in the long corridor, but there was a light here and there stealing from beneath the doors of various rooms, and Greg was half disposed to knock and ask his way to supper, which he feared might be over before he got there, if they gobbled it up as quickly as they did their meals at Fretwell's.

He was very much in the shadows groping there, and he had raised his hand to knock at

the panels of one door, from beneath which a light was streaming, when his own name from within the room startled him not a little. The upraised hand slid quickly to his side, and the boy, quick and agile as a serpent, dropped to the keyhole and put his ear to it, as he had listened many times at Fretwell's place, where spying and eavesdropping had been part of a daily avocation, everybody wanting to know what new business was on the cards to wear their restless lives out.

"Wa'al, friend Woodhatch," said the rough outspoken tone of voice of the tall man whom Greg had seen outside the farm that night, "it's a mad business this Greg's, and ye cannot rayson me into thinking it anything else. Not ye, man."

"I don't want to say anything about it," answered the deep voice of John Woodhatch; "it's you who will talk of the boy."

"Because, my vary obstinate friend, ye'll not be convinced by sarber argument that the whole plan is one of the wildest, strangest, weakest, that ever got into yeer head—and that's saying a great deal."

"I'm not wise."



"I perfectly agree with ye there, John," said the other, with a chuckle.

"But I'm in earnest."

"Yes. What the folk call 'thorough,' and so we respect ye, John; but the deevil himself—the Lord forgive me for mentioning the rprobate—isn't mair obstinate at times than yeer own contrary self."

"What would you do?"

"Send the boy to Canada—set him up there—not bother yeer brains with him in Lincolnshire," was the reply. "It might all be arranged from Canada just as well, if ye keep of the same wilful mind."

What might be arranged? whispered Greg to himself—what on earth were they all after—what had he done, and what were they going to do with him?

"No," answered Woodhatch bluntly, "I will arrange it here. It's a wild notion, I own, Abel; but it can be done—and it's the right and proper thing to do. And at all events I'll try to do it, sparing no pains or money."

"Ah! wasting both, I don't doubt ye, John Woodhatch. I only wish ye had a better

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"No."

"Shall I tell him what my plan is?"

"That would be samplly madness, John. Ye will never do that."

"It would not be wise—although I am far from wise, you know."

"Preceesely, John. But then—there's the other one."

"Ah! yes—the other one," repeated John. "I had forgotten."

"And there's one thing mair ye're forgetting, lad," answered the elder man.

"What's that?"

"Why, the supper, to be sure—and Lucy all alone and woondering what we two consparitars are schaming aboot," was the reply. "Let's get downstairs, and I'll keep my old mouth as straight as I can, so that the lass shall not think I've been a-laughing at ye."

"Laugh on, old friend," was the hearty answer; "you'll not blame me even if I fail."

"Wa'al," came the broad accent in reply, "perhaps not. Ye're a rich man and can affard to pay for failure; but as I said before——"

"Yes, yes, we know. It's a wild scheme—it's everything that's weak and foolish—it's Quixotic—it's a leaf out of a play—and it's a play out of Bedlam, and it's Bedlam gone to the bad," cried John Woodhatch, with a loud laugh; "but still I stick to my idea, old sceptic."

There was a hearty slap between some one's shoulders instead of upon the table, and a fit of coughing followed and a protest against John's want of ceremony and roughness; then there was more laughter, and the noise of chairs being pushed back, and footsteps.

Greg rose from his knees and fled along the dark corridor, cannoning some one or somebody in his flight, and who, advancing in the opposite direction, received Greg's full charge at him, and went with an "ugh!" against the wall, rapping his skull there sharply.

Greg ran on till he came to a flight of stairs leading downwards, and saw servants at the bottom of it and Mrs. Chadderton. He descended more decorously now.

"We have been looking for you everywhere.

Haven't you met Fladge?" asked the housekeeper, looking up at him.

Greg thought he had just met Fladge, but did not say so.

"I lost my way down," he answered. Then he went on to the supper-room, thinking once more of John Woodhatch.

## CHAPTER IV.

### “ THE MAN FOR THE THIRD BED.”

It was a hearty supper which Greg Dorward ate in a long low-ceilinged room crossed by heavy oaken beams, and which was at the back of the big farmhouse. The uncertainty of his position, the mystery which surrounded him, the doubt of the object which had brought him into Lincolnshire, did not in any way tend to spoil Greg's appetite, which was fairly vigorous.

Mrs. Chadderton supped with him, sitting at the head of the table, very grave and silent, but with her watchful eyes everywhere, although on this occasion she was watchful lest the plates should be emptied without her cognizance. Two or three farm-servants, or who looked like farm-servants, of the masculine gender—young, strapping, rosy-cheeked

fellows—supped with him and Mrs. Chadderton; Spikins, at an angle of forty-five, sat on Greg's right; and presently Fladge came into the room, rubbing the back of his head as though he had hurt it somewhere. He looked hard at Greg as he entered, but Master Dorward ate on in conscious innocence, and thought that the suppers at Farm Forlorn were a considerable improvement on the "skilly" served out at the quarters which he had recently quitted.

Yes—everything was an improvement after all; the prospects were brightening, and the outlook less dark to Greg of Bolter's Rents. He *was* no fool, this boy—nay, more, he was, to an extent, a youth of forethought; and as he continued his supper, he was calculating the possible advantages of submitting himself to the rules and regulations of the new establishment. Whatever was in store for him, there was at least the growing fact that no harm was intended, and probably much good. And startling and most remarkable fact of all to the boy's disturbed mind was this, that John Woodhatch actually liked him! Greg had heard the master confess as much in

the shadows of the corridor; and very much amazed he was, knowing that only Kitty had ever cared for him in all the world, and out of all the world—knowing that he was generally hated, and feeling possibly he deserved to be hated for hating everybody else. And John Woodhatch had said in the room on the first floor, "I like the boy," and had said it twice, too. He could not do much harm by stopping a little while, Greg began to think for the first time; here was a man who liked him, and a rich man who kept a big house, and was going to do something for him presently. He would be glad to know awfully what Mr. Woodhatch thought of doing for him, and why the other man thought John Woodhatch was mad and foolish to attempt it. And he must stay to know all that—stay some time and give the place a trial—look about and keep his eyes open.

He had some trouble to keep his eyes open at all the remainder of that evening. He had been accustomed to get to bed early at Fretwell's school—even in the daylight when the summer nights were short—and he was wholly unused to railway journeys, and sea air at

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the end of them, and drives across country in a high wind. He was anxious to keep awake—to have his ears open as well as his eyes—but sleep was strong upon him, and his eyelids were unaccountably heavy. He dozed off presently at the supper-table, waking up with a start to find all eyes upon him, and Fladge grinning at his efforts to keep awake; he met Mrs. Chadderton's long and steady stare in his direction before she faded away into a mist into which he was lost, and then jerked out again by his head nearly falling off; he heard the clattering of plates and dishes which were being cleared away; he became conscious of Mr. Woodhatch standing in the open doorway facing him and regarding him as gravely as Mrs. Chadderton had done, and then the young bright face of a fair-haired girl, dressed in white, shone by the farmer's side and disappeared again, as a ghost's might have done, before he was thoroughly conscious where he was, and what he wanted in that prosperous home.

"You are dead beat, Greg," said Woodhatch's voice in his ear suddenly, "so good night to you. We will talk of business in the morning."

"Yessir," answered Greg in his old fashion.

"Good night, Fladge," the farmer added.

"You'll go up with him."

"Ay—ay. I've been ready long ago," answered Fladge, with another burst of laughter.

Greg felt for the first time slightly nervous at sleeping in the same room with this laughing lout, who was "wrong *here* a little bit," as Mr. Woodhatch had delicately put it. He hoped it was only a little bit; he had not thought much of it before, or cared much whether it was a little bit or a big one, until the fact that he was going upstairs arm-in-arm with him to bed began to impress him by degrees uncomfortably.

Nevertheless he was too sleepy to think the matter out; he wanted rest, his bones ached, he was not quite certain he was very well, despite the large supper—or on account of the large supper—which he had consumed, and he was very quickly in the bed near the door which had been pointed out to him as his especial property.

Fladge, like himself, was a youth of few words, Greg perceived, and that was some consolation. Greg wanted rest and no con-

versation with his companion; and Fladge, though he smiled once or twice to himself at his own happy thoughts, sat on the edge of his bed and did not ask any questions, even about their little collision in the corridor. Greg fell asleep very quickly; it was not a sound, refreshing sleep, but troubled with "jumps," the last one of which so pleased Reuben Fladge that Greg, who had jumped back suddenly to wakefulness, found his companion standing by the side of the bed with a broader grin than usual on his countenance.

"Nightmare," observed Fladge—"kicking nightmare. I knows 'em—I hates 'em."

Greg regarded him doubtfully.

"Ain't yer agoin' to bed?" inquired Greg.

"What are yer staring at me for?"

"I'm going to bed presently. When the lights are out—and I feels safe," explained Fladge.

"Oh!" said Greg, turning his back upon him and rolling the sheets round him.

He did not drop off readily to sleep again, having his doubts of Master Fladge now, and thinking it was not at all unlikely that Fladge would feel in his pockets presently, or get his

key and open his box, or "nick" the worsted purse which Kitty had given him that morning, just as he might have done himself under similar circumstances. But Reuben Fladge had no felonious intentions. He walked to the window, opened it, and leaned out with his arms crossed upon the sill, intensely interested in the dark sky, or the dark garden and farm land beneath, or in the present condition of the weather, and totally regardless of the breeze which he was introducing to young Greg.

"What are yer openin' the winder for?" asked Greg sullenly, at last.

"I'm hot," was Reuben's answer.

"I ain't," said Greg.

"Oh, you're all right. You're a lucky one; ain't you, now? ha, ha!"

Greg thought it was not desirable to continue the conversation any further, and he was not disposed to quarrel about windows, open or shut, to-night. To-morrow night he would "let him have it," if he tried that game on any more. He wondered faintly what Fladge meant by calling him a lucky one; and how much, or little, *he* knew of the

business on hand ; and then he dropped off into sleep again, and dreamed he was "in solitary," where somebody had taken the roof off to let in all the cussed wind—wind which blew the "solitary" down at last, and covered him with bricks and mortar, and nearly pressed him into his grave, he thought, till he woke with a wrench and a groan from nightmare number two, and was convinced that he was still in bed, and shaking like a jelly.

He looked round for Fladge, expecting to find that youth once more studying him, and amused by his contortions ; but he was not by his side on this occasion. He was not in the room even, Greg discovered, after a moment's glance round the apartment. The candle was guttering in the washstand in the draught, the beds before him were unoccupied, and had not been occupied ; the latticed window was being swung to and fro in the wind, its metal frame clashing unpleasantly against the wall ; two flower-pots on the sill had been blown into the room, and were lying smashed upon the floor—and Fladge was gone. It was the noise which had awakened Greg, and given

him a nightmare-dream of ruin and disaster; but it was the consciousness that Fladge had disappeared, which made him sit up and rub his eyes to make sure his companion had really stolen away.

Greg got out of bed to look after him—to open cupboards, and peer under beds, to try the door which was unlocked, and without a key; to go to the window and look down at the dark garden ground some thirty feet below, and speculate as to whether Fladge had gone that way, descending by the branches of a big plum tree, which was nailed against the wall. And having gone in that direction, with what object had he gone, waiting for Greg to drop soundly off to sleep before he slipped away?

"This *must* be a bloomin' mad'ouse," muttered Greg, as he stood at the window looking down for Reuben Fladge, "unless he's cut and run for it, bein' as sick of it as I shall be—jolly quick."

The wild blood in him, the impulse to be free once more, to be independent of everything and everybody, the terrible longing to go, made him envy the action of his companion,

and wish he was in his place. He had had four years and more of restraint, and it was hard to begin over again. Let them call this freedom if they liked; it was captivity to the waif's mind; it was trying to be good, and that he had always hated "werry much." He was born bad. He knew that. He knew well enough that Mrs. Chadderton was right when she had told him that a Dorward *never* came to any good; though how she knew it was one more of the mysteries to be accounted for at Farm Forlorn, when Greg had had time to settle down.

And settling down did not appear to be easy work; even settling down for the night. He would have been glad of one long, quiet rest to begin with; and it had been denied him, on account of the eccentricity of Reuben Fladge, whose footsteps he fancied he could hear now crunching on some distant gravel path.

Greg, lightly attired, was still looking down at the garden, when a voice very close to him in the room gave him a second fright, and convinced him he was possessed of nerves as well as other folk.

"Don't you think you had better get into bed?" were the commonplace words addressed to him; but sounding very strangely at that hour, and thus unceremoniously spoken.

Greg turned round with a start, to find a good-looking young fellow sitting on a chair unlacing his boots, and calmly surveying him.

"Who—who are yer?" asked Greg, with a gasp.

"I'm the man for the third bed. Haven't you been expecting me?"

"No, I 'aven't."

"Are you the chap they call Greg?"

"Yes, I am."

"The new party we have been waiting for so long," he said, laughing. "Did you come from London to-day?"

"Yes, I did."

"I have come a long way, but not so far as that. What are you doing at the window—trying to catch cold?"

"I was looking for Fladge," answered Greg.

"Has he gone down that way?" said the young man, leaving off the unlacing of his



boots and joining Greg at the window. "Ah! he does, sometimes. A queer fish, Fladge. Touched, you know."

"Yes, I know," answered Greg.

"So are you a bit; arn't you?" asked the new-comer with charming frankness.

"No, I ain't," replied Greg, very much disgusted with the inquiry.

"Somebody told me you were, I'm sure," said the other; "and I'm hanged if you don't look like it, hanging about there in your night-shirt. Why the blazes don't you get into bed?"

"I got up becos' of the row," Greg explained. "Them things were blown into the room, and then Fladge was gone. I thought he might have fell out o' winder."

"Not he. Trust Fladge not to fall anywhere but on his feet; he was a regular Jack Sheppard once. Did you ever read Jack Sheppard?"

"No," answered Greg; "I've heerd on him, o' course."

"Yes, of course. How long has Fladge been gone, did you say?"

"I didn't say," answered Greg, turning into bed again.

"I thought you did," said the new-comer. "Never mind, it does not matter ; he knows his way back. I shan't sit up for him."

But he did not proceed with the unlacing of his boots ; on the contrary, flung himself outside his bed, and lay there, boots and all.

"Good night, youngster," he said.

"Good night," answered Greg.

"Are you sleepy ?"

"No."

"You ought to have been after your journey. I am. Oh," and here he sat up for a moment and looked across at Greg, "you need not say anything to Mr. Woodhatch or Mrs. Chadderton about Fladge's getting out of window. You're not such a sneak as that."

"N—no," answered Greg, "I ain't a sneak."

"It might worry them, and they are good souls, Greg ; and Fladge doesn't mean any harm. There's not a better fellow living than Fladge."

"Ah," said Greg apathetically.

"And he went away about half an hour ago, you say ?"

"I didn't say so," cried Greg ; "I don't

know when he went. I didn't see him hook it."

"Oh! Good night again. Get off to sleep as soon as you can," he advised, "for you will not have much rest at the other end of the day. We are early birds here."

And "late 'uns" too, thought Greg. And night-birds also, flitting to and fro in the darkness, like the owls and bats and foxes, he might have added, had he had time to think, or had known anything about the creatures which are restless after sundown, and wake with the on-coming night.

Greg curled himself round in his bed, as though preparing to follow the counsel of his companion; but he was of a suspicious turn of mind, we are aware; and he kept an eye upon him, as the young man stretched himself full length upon the bed again, and yawned. It was a dark, little glittering eye, too, which shone like a serpent's from the distance, until the light went out—or was puffed out—leaving the room in sudden darkness.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE REST OF THE NIGHT.

GREG DORWARD had not bargained for being left in the dark, although used to the dark in more senses than one. He had grown accustomed to the light in the farmhouse dormitory, and its sudden extinguishment took him off his guard, and rendered him wakeful and watchful. There was mystery at every turn of his life at Farm Forlorn, though life there was to be counted only by the last few hours. There was something going on—there was a great deal going on—beyond his cognizance, and he was pretty well certain beyond the cognizance of John Woodhatch, the proprietor of the establishment. Greg probably did not think it was in any way to be wondered at, considering the surroundings ; and Greg would be right enough.

Men and boys—and women possibly—taken from prisons and reformatories were not to be trusted, or converted in a heap, despite the confidence of the philanthropist in the good that might ensue—the good flowing like a tiny silver thread through all the bad blood in them. This man, full of his own hopes and energies, and a faith in humankind waiting only for its chance, was perhaps less wise and had less knowledge of the shadowy world he would enlighten than the boy of sixteen whom he had brought into the sphere of his influence. But John Woodhatch was an enthusiast, and Greg Dorward was a strange, hard, sceptical youth, even for Bolter's Rents. Even on the threshold of our story proper, it is not difficult to see wherein John Woodhatch miscalculated his own strength and knowledge; it was always John Woodhatch in the place of the one he would assist, and every one was to act as John Woodhatch would have done under similar circumstances.

He had seen himself in Greg, having lived and fought hard to live in Bolter's Rents; having filched goods from shop-doors and counters, picked pockets, stood in a police-

court,—on a stool, because his head would not come within sight of the magistrate on the bench,—passed from gaol to reformatory, exactly as Greg Dorward had done, step by step, on the same bad, downward road. But he had not been in any way like Greg Dorward, after all, though he did not see this from the first; and there was no true reflex of his life in that of the boy whom he had set himself to save. In a few words—for we need not attempt to disguise the character of a central figure in our story—John Woodhatch was not as shrewd a man, as far-seeing a man, as he thought he was. A natural error into which we are all very prone to drift, to the infinite amazement of our friends, relations, and acquaintances—especially our relations!—but something more than an error, and one very difficult to escape from when it comes to the criminal classes, and groping in the foul regions in which such things of evil lurk.

Greg was wholly devoid of faith, and possessed of a terrible knowledge of crime. The devil had well trained this poor human soul, or Daddy Devil had as a substitute, and supposing, after the new fashion of argument,

that the former gentleman has not even the personality of a butterfly. Greg had heard an excellent account of Reuben Fladge from the master—"honest, faithful, true as steel, but touched *here* a little;" but what honesty, fidelity, truth, really was, Greg had no idea, save from a few words delivered at the reformatory, and which had sounded like a story-book. "Touched," he understood; and doubtless Fladge, whether true as steel, or weak as water, *was* touched, and clambering out of the window in the middle of the night was a striking example of his "touchedness," only—only Greg was sure that was not the reason for Reuben's disappearance. He was quite sure there was, in his own streety language, "a game on" somewhere. Presently, it is more than probable he would have been glad to join in it; but to be kept out of it altogether was to set the boy's wits to work at once against them all. He had been always "in opposition;" it was his native element.

As the light went out, Greg went out also—out of his bed like an eel! The new-comer might want to cut his throat, or play some joke upon him; and, at all events, Greg wasn't

going to stop there. The stranger was lying on his bed in his shirt-sleeves, ready for something or other, and not thinking of turning in for the night. He was probably waiting for Fladge to return ; and so would Greg wait, very patiently, too, and in Reuben Fladge's bed instead of his own. After executing this strategetic manœuvre very cleverly and noiselessly—all this kind of business had been extensively practised where he had come from—he lay still, waiting for events ; and the young man on the other bed lay still also, and hardly seemed to breathe. The window remained open, but the casement in its zinc frame no longer swayed to and fro, and clashed against the side ; the wind had dropped, or else the new inmate in the room had secured it in the dark.

How long Greg lay and waited there he never knew ; he dozed off again, despite his watchful task, the journey having tired him out completely. When he opened his eyes again, to his great astonishment, the candle was relighted, and there were Fladge and the handsome young man standing with their hands in their pockets, and their mouths slightly ajar, looking down upon him.



"How the deuce did you get there?" asked the last-comer; "you weren't in Fladge's bed when I blew the light out."

"Walks in my sleep," explained Greg, blinking at his inquirer.

"D'ye hear in your sleep, too?" asked Fladge.

"Not as I knows on," answered Greg.

"Did ye hear me coom back, ha! ha!——"

"There, don't laugh, Fladge, at this time of night," said the other, shaking him forcibly by the collar; "or we shall have Mother Chadderton down on us."

"All right, Morris; I know."

"And here, you, sir," said Morris to Greg; "don't try any tricks, or play the sneak on us. It won't pay."

"And coom out o' my bed, darn your impudence," cried Fladge, reaching out a long arm, and plucking Greg like a kitten from between the sheets, and dropping him a few yards off on the floor with an unceremonious bump which shook the room.

Greg was amazed at Reuben Fladge's strength, but his passion was high, and he had always been quick—rather too quick—to

retaliate. He sprang up and would have rushed at Fladge forthwith had not Morris caught him by both arms and pinioned him as in a vice.

"That will do," said Morris. "You and Fladge can fight it out to-morrow, and I'll be umpire, if you like. Now get to bed—we don't have rows in this house. Never in this house, mind."

Morris spoke firmly and with authority, and Greg went to his own bed scarcely cowed, but disposed to submit to superior force, and convinced that they were a roughish lot, Skegs Shore way.

He had hardly crept into his own crib before there came the quick, hasty rapping of sharp knuckles on the panels of the door without.

"What noise was that?" asked the harsh voice of Mrs. Chadderton. "Why are you not all in bed?"

"Greg's been a-walkin' in his sleep, and a-frightenin' me," said Fladge, after which he stuffed a considerable portion of the sheet into his mouth to stop his own hilarious appreciation of the joke from being heard beyond the room.

"Morris," said the voice in the corridor almost reproachfully, "could not you stop them?"

"I'll see they're quiet now, Mrs. Chadderton, at any rate."

"You know how lightly the master sleeps, how badly he rests when once disturbed," said the deep voice without.

"Yes, yes—all right, ma'am. Good night."

"Good night," responded Mrs. Chadderton.

Then all was still, and once more the light in the sleeping-room was extinguished.

"She's as wakeful as a cat," muttered Morris; and they were the last words Greg Dorward heard on his first night at Farm Forlorn.

## CHAPTER VI.

### GREG'S FIRST DAY.

It was morning—bright morning with the sun shining, and leaves trembling in the sunshine, with big green trees rustling and tossing their great branches to and fro, and birds innumerable singing and twittering, when Greg Dorward and his companions were aroused from sleep by another summons at the door.

“Now, boys—come on. Now, Greg.”

Morris and Reuben Fladge were out of bed on the instant, and as the heavy footsteps tramped away along the corridor, Greg lay and blinked at his contemporaries' expeditious movements, and wondered whether work were beginning very early, or if he had overslept himself. He had been used to early rising at Fretwell's, but this seemed earlier ; there was

something in the daylight which told him so, and his observant faculties had not deceived him.

"It's early, ain't it?" said Greg, turning out reluctantly.

"Yes—I should think it was," answered Morris; "but it's three-quarters of a mile to the sea."

"What are we going to the sea for?" asked Greg—a question which caused Fladge to shout with laughter, to sit down upon the side of his bed and shriek, the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"That'll do, Reu; it's a good joke, but it'll do, I think," said Morris, with a thwack on Reuben's shoulders quite forcible enough to knock all the laughter out of him. "Look alive. We are keeping the master waiting, and he hates that."

"Ay—and a rare temper he can show when he does wait, Morris. D'ye mind that day when——"

"No—I don't. Here's your towels, Greg. Let us leave old Fladge in the lurch," cried Morris.

Towels. Yes, they were certainly towels

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which Morris had pitched at him and over him, and Greg realized that bathing—and bathing in the open sea—was the first item in the programme. He shuddered and did not like the prospect; if this was the general beginning of the day, he certainly felt that it was a very bad beginning for him, however much these long-limbed, stalwart fellows, five or six years his seniors, might like it.

They went out of the room along the corridor, and down the stairs at a quick rate. At the bottom of the stairs stood John Woodhatch, with a large bathing-towel over his arm, and a huge brown dog, with his tongue on his chest, and laughing like Fladge, Greg thought, sitting by his master.

“You have not hurried yourselves,” said Mr. Woodhatch gruffly, “but you were late up last night.”

Fladge started, and looked at Morris and Greg.

“We were all late up,” the farmer continued; “these London jaunts upset our quiet country habits. What time did you get back, Morris?”

"Soon after you had retired, sir," answered Morris.

"You have enjoyed your holiday?" asked the former.

"Very much."

"And found all well at home?"

"Yes, quite well, thank you, sir. She sent her best love and gratitude for all your kind thoughts of her."

"Tut, tut—nonsense."

"She made me promise they should be the first words to say to you—and I have said them," concluded Morris.

"And said them like a book. Well, that's dutiful," said Woodhatch, "though I did not want her thanks. Are you ready?"

Yes, they were all ready, and out of the house they sallied together with the brown dog, excitable and noisy, and a little curious as to the backs of Greg's legs, which were evidently strange to him. They crossed the high-road where Greg had alighted last night from the chaise, opened a gate, and went on over a broad sweep of meadow land and deep-cut ditches crossed by narrow planks. Presently the ditches became more numerous,

the grass land was left behind, and they were ankle-deep in sand, sometimes almost knee-deep where the ground was uneven and treacherous, and a coarse, spear-like grass shot up and seemed struggling hard to live. And beyond the sand-banks stretched for miles a low, long line of sea-shore, and facing them was the great grey sea—tossing and pitching with big waves that morning, and breaking on the sands in cataracts of foam and with a roar like thunder.

Greg shivered, and instinctively went closer to the master. Morris and Fladge, longer and stronger of limb, were a clear hundred yards ahead now, with Carlo, the dog, running and leaping by their sides.

“Is that the sea?” asked Greg in a low tone of wonderment.

“Yes—a Lincolnshire sea.”

Greg did not like the look of it, and the wind blew cold and fresh that morning to a Londoner, despite the sunshine overhead.

“We’ll see you are not drowned, Greg,” said Mr. Woodhatch lightly. “Do you swim at all?”

“Not a ha’poth,” answered Greg, who had



scarcely seen water save in raindrops or street puddles till he had got to Fretwell's.

"You will soon take to the sea."

"Oh, shall I!" muttered Greg almost ironically.

"There's a new strong life in it, and it will put a new strong life into you," said Woodhatch. "See what stalwart lads they are—and they were weak, puny boys a few years back."

They were certainly not weak now, thought Greg, remembering last night, and how helpless he had been in their hands.

"And that chap," said Greg, nodding his head towards Morris, "is he like all the rest on us?"

"No," answered Woodhatch, "for I took him away early from harm. You will like Morris Brake—everybody likes him. Even Mrs. Chadderton," he added with a smile.

"She don't like many of us, does she?" asked Greg, identifying himself with the staff now.

"She's hard to please—that's all, Greg; but then people don't try to please her as they should do," he replied. "And yet there is not a more faithful woman in the world. I

could trust her with my life," he added thoughtfully; "with anything except——"

He did not complete his sentence, although Greg's little dark eyes looked up to him for the rest of it. He strode on, swinging his towels in advance of Greg after this. Presently he began to hum snatches of a song in a voice that was rich and musical, and Greg thought that the master, in his grey suit and slouch felt cap, was a better, "jollier" sort of fellow than the man in broadcloth who had brought him yesterday from London. But he knew John Woodhatch's private opinion of him now, and that was satisfactory in some points.

Then came the bath in the rough, salt sea, and Greg felt disgusted with the place again, and with Lincolnshire manners generally. He felt that they were all prepared to laugh at him—Fladge had begun to laugh beforehand, it need hardly be said—and John Woodhatch had told him to be careful, and promised to keep an eye upon him. And whilst they were all watching his *début*, he had lost his temper and dashed into the surf like a mad thing to show he was not afraid of anything. He was

quickly taken off his legs and whirled away like driftweed, and John Woodhatch plunged after him and brought him to shore, very short of breath, and feeling like a half-drowned rat, whilst the laughter of Fladge and Morris echoed along the sands.

"That's quite enough water for the first day, Greg. Go and dress now."

"Not while they are laughin' at me," said Greg between his chattering teeth. "I—I ain't afraid; but—but—it's so beastly cold!"

He ran into the sea again just to show his contempt of danger, and then scuttled out and away to his clothes—a poor little shrimp of a lad, after whom John Woodhatch gazed thoughtfully before plunging into salt water again. Woodhatch and the two lads swam out into deep water along with Carlo, and were lost to the sight of Greg behind the waves, until Greg began to think they were all three drowned, and to feel even a little scared at the possibility, although doubtful if it would not be the best for the lot of them. They came back safely to shore, however, and presently they were dressed and marching back towards the farm, all aglow with their

morning bath, excepting Greg, who was goose-flesh from top to toe, and had thrust his arms into his pockets to his elbows for comfort's sake. At the farm there followed breakfast for the three youths in the room where they had supped last night, with Mrs. Chadderton at the head of the table as before, silent and observant.

What she saw in him to stare at Greg did not know, unless she put down last night's noise to him, or he was looking very ill. He felt he should like to make faces at her in return, but, as a "new 'un," she might think he was in a hurry to show his dislike to her. It was Greg's ruling weakness, perhaps; he was always in a hurry.

Presently the day's work began in earnest, and there was a stir in the big hive, men right and left proceeding to labour in the fields, to the care of flocks and herds, to the big barns and granaries in the rear of the premises.

"You can help Spikins in the garden to-day, Greg," said Mr. Woodhatch. "Morris shall teach you farming later on. You are not afraid of work?"

"No," answered Greg; "I'm used to it."

"You haven't got over your journey yet—and the sea did not freshen you up as I thought it would."

"It was fresh enuf, at any rate," said Greg.

"Did you sleep well?"

"Pretty well," answered Greg.

"Mrs. Chadderton says you were all awake hours after the house was still. How was that?" asked John Woodhatch.

Mrs. Chadderton was a sneak, thought Greg.

"I got in the wrong bed, and had to get out of it," explained Greg.

"Ha—sharp enough, I dare say," answered Woodhatch.

He strolled into the garden at the back of the farmhouse, and made over Greg to Mr. Spikins, who, in his shirt-sleeves, was hoeing and weeding, with his figure very much bent and his head craned forwards after a fashion which had attracted Greg's notice last night.

"There's been some rare tramping about the beds, measter," said Mr. Spikins, endeavouring vainly to straighten himself whilst addressing the farmer. "After the late apples, I'm reckonin'—the thieves. And there's a rose

tree clean smashed in 'arf under Miss Lucy's window."

"The wind was high last night," answered John Woodhatch, turning away as if disinclined for further conversation with Mr. Spikins, to whose care he had consigned the new-comer for the nonce.

"He won't leesten—he never will leesten to what a man says to him," muttered Spikins, looking after his master; "and I could have told him a deal more, if he had let me. It's not late apples that makes people walk at night here—and it's not thieves. And it's not——" Here the old man's fishy eyes alighted on Greg standing there all attention. "Oh! you want something to do, do you? Here, catch hold of that hoe—not that one, that's mine!" he yelled—"and get as many weeds out there as you can, whilst I rest my poor back a bit. I'm eighty-three, and worked like a horse, I am."

Greg took the hoe and set to work, with Mr. Spikins watching his labour closely and offering a little advice when necessary.

"Eighty-three's a good age, ain't it?" he asked snappishly a few moments later, as Greg

had evinced no surprise at a statement of which the old man was very proud and generally communicative.

"Rather," answered Greg.

"Rather!" growled Mr. Spikins. "You little dead-and-alive London worr'im, you'll never live to half my age."

"Don't want to," Greg responded.

"You're a poor sickly bit of a brat to cum here at all," Spikins went on; "and there was enough of us without you. Quite enough."

"I didn't ask to come," said Greg.

"Oh! the master went down on his knees and begged and prayed you, I suppose?" cried Mr. Spikins satirically. "Oh! yes, that's like him—uncommon."

"It wouldn't have done to disapp'int him," remarked Greg, not at all disinclined to aggravate Mr. Spikins in return for his personal observations; "and as he wanted me ever so much, I came on jest to see what the crib was like."

"It was uncommon kind of you," said old Spikins, with a snarl. "I hope you'll be able to put up with it."

"Hope I shall," responded Greg.

"Hope you slept well last night, you and Mr. Morris and Fladge,—all in that top room yonder, ain't you?" asked Mr. Spikins, taking off a tall, old beaver hat, which evidently weighed many pounds and might have represented a solid hat in rusty iron, and wiping his wrinkled forehead and bald head very carefully with a cotton handkerchief.

"Oh! that's the room, is it?" said Greg, looking up.

"Don't you know it's the room?"

"No."

"Then you're a fool."

"How am I to know? Oh! yes, there's a big tree nailed against the wall—I see."

"And a very handy tree it is, too," remarked Spikins; "only I'm going to ax the master to let me cut it down."

"Oh, air yer?"

"It's a tree much too handy. Folks might get into the house that way, if they was young and good at climbing, now. Or out of it," he added. "You tell Master Morris I'm going to cut it down. You tell him——"

"Tell him yerself," said Greg shortly.

Mr. Spikins was irritable and spiteful, but



then every allowance should be made for the infirmity of years. That was a maxim conveyed in the three words, "RESPECT OLD AGE," which Greg had had to write very often in his copy-book at Fretwell's ; but he did not feel any respect for Spikins after he had picked up his hoe and made a cut at Greg's head with the sharp end of it, from which Greg, generally on the alert, bobbed away with considerable adroitness.

" You're a quick lad. You can see when anythink's a-comin'," said Mr. Spikins dryly.

" Yes. Don't do it again, old man, though—that's all," said Greg.

Mr. Spikins was startled at Greg's expression of countenance, and went on with his hoeing very quietly after that, keeping one eye on Greg and saying no more to him for the rest of the morning.

In the night—after the day's work was over, and one complete day of his apprenticeship to hard work had been served—Greg thought it necessary on his part, and for the sake of comradeship, to give Mr. Spikins's message to young Morris. He was " one of them," and must chum in with them, if possible, and if life was to be worth anything at Farm Forlorn.

At all events, he must show he was not against them. Perhaps he had learned his lesson from Fretwell's after all, and seen what a failure he had been there—at war with all of them.

Morris heard what Greg had to say, steadily surveying Greg meanwhile, and his handsome face shadowing as he listened.

“ And Spikins told you to tell me that ? ” said Morris.

“ Yes.”

“ Well—it's a hint. And he means it for a hint.”

He sat on the edge of his bed with his arms folded and his gaze upon the floor; the message had evidently disturbed and depressed him. Suddenly Fladge began to laugh in his old idiotic fashion.

“ I reckon it's all about up now, Master Morris,” he cried out.

“ You reckon too quickly, then,” was the sharp answer. “ I'm not likely to give up—to say die. Why should I, Fladge ? ”

“ Ay! Why should ee ? ”

“ I have made up my mind,” he added; and Greg wondered what was in his mind to be made up, and to make him so thoughtful afterwards.

## CHAPTER VII.

## IN THE FARM PARLOUR.

At an earlier hour that evening, although after the nine-o'clock supper which was the universal rule, there sat three of the characters of our story in the well-furnished parlour of Farm Forlorn. The fire was blazing brightly in the grate, for though the leaves were still upon the trees, and autumn had a fair number of weeks to run, the nights were cold in Lincolnshire, especially in that part of Lincolnshire bordering on the sea. The deep red curtains were drawn before the windows, there was a small grog-kettle singing on the fire, and there were on the table two glasses and a liqueur-frame of spirits waiting for the grog-kettle.

John Woodhatch and Mr. Larcom—the Reverend Alexander Larcom some people

called him, although he disliked the title himself, and told everybody he was only a poor Methodist parson—sat one on each side of the fire. They were smoking long clay pipes; two men at their ease—old cronies, although one crony was twenty-five years the senior of the other, with closely cropped hair as white as snow, and with legions of deep furrows in his face, which was a firm, rugged face to look at. It was a different expression of firmness to that of John Woodhatch's, which always gave the impression that it might soften at an appeal for pity, mercy, forgiveness, when needed and made in real, true earnest; but Mr. Larcom's countenance immediately assured you that it was not likely to be affected by anything or anybody. And yet Mr. Larcom was a genuine, good-tempered Methodist parson enough; fond of his friendly jests in the week-days with the members of his flock; interested in his flock, too, and in their spiritual and temporal requirements; a vigorous and demonstrative preacher on Sundays in the primitive cottage which did duty as his chapel, and where he shouted very much and worked himself into a white heat of fervour, and let the world of Skegs

Shore and parts adjacent know every bit of his mind. He bore a good character for kindness, even generosity, with the little amount he had to spare for generous acts; he was thought wise and shrewd and devout, but it struck no one he was a man to be imposed upon, or to be convinced against his will. A hard man, although no one knew exactly why he should be called hard—unless it was that he was hard upon sinners, or those whom he considered sinners, and had, they considered, a very bad habit of not leaving them alone.

At the farther extremity of the room sat Lucy Larcom, his daughter—the only daughter of the young woman he had married late in life, and lost with the advent of his child into the world—a fair-haired, very pretty girl, with large dreamy blue eyes. One on whom some eighteen summers rested as gracefully as eighteen summers invariably will on those who are blessed with good health, good temper, and good looks. Lucy was playing the piano—or rather letting her white fingers glide carelessly over the keys of a Broadwood's grand—a fine instrument, new and bright and imposing in its rosewood case, but which

was out of character with the old-fashioned, massive oak furniture by which it was surrounded.

John Woodhatch was fond of music, and evidently liked it of as good a quality as could be obtained, and from as good a source—although his love of harmony had come a little late in the day perhaps, the piano having reached Farm Forlorn only a week ago. And the parson's daughter could play well, it was evident, even to the untutored ear of John Woodhatch; there was a touch of genius in her—that genius which could give life and feeling to the instrument, and which even then, in extemporaneous ramblings of plaintive chords and subdued melodies, told of one who had studied much, and with an artist's earnestness.

“You'll be going away to-morrow, Lucy,” said John Woodhatch very suddenly, “and I'm thinking you may as well take that thing with you. It's not much use to me, I fancy.”

The remark seemed to startle Mr. Larcom, who, from under his shaggy white brows, shot a keen, critical glance at his host—a man graver and even sterner than usual that night.

"Oh! thank you, John; but—it would fill the whole house. There is not a door or a window in our little home which could possibly admit it," answered Lucy, without desisting from her playing, which came in its subdued tone and meaning like an accompaniment to her words—like the "business" of the orchestra at a playhouse when the characters speak with meaning, and the audience's extra attention is required. "It would be as much out of place as——"

"Here," he added quietly, as she paused.

"Oh no!—there is plenty of room here," said Lucy.

"And no one to play—or to care for music after you have gone. Why, what's the use of it to me?" asked the farmer.

"*'Why didn't you think of that before, Johnnie?'*" sang Lucy saucily, and whilst striking various little chords. "You did not invest in this very expensive instrument because dad and I were to mind the farm during your London holiday."

"Holiday!" muttered John Woodhatch. "Well, yes, I *did* invest for that reason. I was afraid you would lose your practice,

Lucy, and so I sent a piano down to Skegs Shore."

"And mooch astonished we all were when it arrived," remarked Mr. Larcom; "and a vary extravagant piece of beesiness we thought it, I must say, John."

"I am a man of extravagant notions."

"Ye are," asserted his friend.

"Which is another name for foolish ideas, Alec."

"Preceesely so."

"And there's something pleasant in being a visionary," the farmer continued, "and getting away from this hard, practical earth into the clouds."

"Yes, at times," answered Lucy thoughtfully; "but not to be always in the clouds."

"Like a balloon," added her father; "a wobbling, gassy monstrosity, going whichever way the weend pleases to carry it. That's not a raytional exeestence, John; and, moreover, it's not the exeestence of John Woodhatch, and it's no use humbugging me into pretending it is."

John Woodhatch laughed, though it was somewhat of a forced effort at pleasantry.



“ Well, only now and then in the clouds, as Lucy says, and coming down again with a bump to mother earth.”

“ And not minding the bumps much, John, eh ? ” said Mr. Larcom.

“ Not making much fuss about it, at any rate ; ” and John Woodhatch laughed again, and with about the same degree of effort.

“ I’m a-thinking the kettle boils,” said Mr. Larcom, “ and I’ll take the leeberty of helping meeself.”

“ Do—do,” repeated Woodhatch absently.

Mr. Larcom not only mixed for himself, but for John Woodhatch, who did not thank the preacher for his attention, but suffered the glass of toddy to remain untouched at his elbow. Presently the eyes of Mr. Larcom encountered the wide, staring eyes of Mr. Woodhatch, and seemed to read a question in them, or take a hint therefrom.

“ And though this is the end of a playsant holiday for Lucy and me,” said Mr. Larcom, “ though we have had the run of this big hooseplace, and been marnarchs of all we surveyed, and shall go back a leetle bit put out at the infiniteesimal deemensions of the

cottage on the high-road yonder, still we shall consider it as only the beginning of other holidays, of other playsant meetings at Farm Forlorn, which meeserable title to a happy homestead I should be vary glad to see ye alter."

"Take it altogether, it's appropriate," said Woodhatch in reply.

"Ye're in a most marbid and uncoomfortable mood, John," said the parson. "Lucy, play him something lively, for mercy's sake—a speeret-stirring wedding march, now, which shall ring in his ears till we coom back again to keep him company."

Lucy dashed into Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," and Mr. Larcom, looking steadily at John, touched his arm, and said, "*Now!*" John Woodhatch nodded, and Mr. Larcom, taking his glass of whiskey and water in his hand, stole softly out of the room, without the knowledge of his daughter, and went away to his own—a neat little study on the first floor, and which had been at the service of Alec Larcom for several years, and when he had needed any change, or rest, or companionship. Outside the door of

this room Greg had been listening last night.

Lucy, deeply interested in her own theme, continued to play for several minutes, with energy and effect, and in perfect ignorance of her father's stealthy withdrawal from the scene. John Woodhatch had put his pipe in the grate, and was listening, and waiting, and watching. Suddenly Lucy looked up, glanced wildly round, missed her father, and closed the piano with a sudden clang.

"I—I didn't know papa had gone," she said, changing colour very rapidly, and speaking in a trembling voice.

"Yes; some minutes ago."

"I will go to him."

"Are you afraid to stay with me?" he asked in a low, deep tone.

"Afraid, John! Oh no; but——"

"But afraid of what, I might say? I so old and you so young; so old a lover and so young a maiden—December and May. Like that foolish print yonder," he said, pointing to the well-known engraving of the title which he had mentioned.

"Oh, not so bad as that," said Lucy, almost hysterically; "but you will not—I mean you will spare me, dear old trusted friend?"

"Your father has told you?"

"Yes—partly—all, I think. I don't know, I don't remember; but you will not!" she exclaimed incoherently, although he comprehended every word she said, and understood more than she implied—"for my sake! Will you?"

"You know, then, why your father has left us together on this last night of your stay?" he inquired.

"Yes," she confessed; "I fear I do."

"Do not fear any longer, Lucy," he said, very tenderly. "I am not going to ask you to be my wife, as your father wishes, and as he thinks I am going to do."

The girl clasped her hands together, and looked relieved in mind. The harassed, pained expression of a minute since vanished from her fair young face.

"I have not had a thought of worrying you about myself," said John Woodhatch—"not I!"

“ Indeed ! ”

“ I want to talk to you about Morris Brake,”  
he said ; “ that’s all.”

“ You know—— ”

“ Everything.”

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FOR THE FATHER'S SAKE.

"I WANT to talk to you about Morris Brake."

Lucy had heard the words and answered them, or partly answered them, but she was hardly certain she had heard aright. He had spoken very calmly, like a friend deeply interested in her, and as if solicitous concerning her next step even, but still so quietly, sitting there in his old place by the fireside, two or three yards away, and looking across the room at her. She had closed the piano, but had not risen from the music-stool—she was like a girl afraid to move, as she sat regarding him with two great wondering eyes. What was the next thing he would say?—and, ah! what a deal depended upon it! She might love or hate him very much within the next five minutes. Was he to be her friend or

foe? He got up at last, and began to walk up and down the room, his hands crossed behind him, after his old fashion, his gaze bent downwards as though all he had to say was written on the carpet, and the lines were difficult to decipher. She retained her place, and, with hands clasped together, listened to him eagerly.

“Until the last three months, Lucy,” he began, “I was weak enough to think you might in time be taught to love me—that from the child’s affection for her father’s friend, would come presently some scrap of woman’s love for him. I was not an old man, and you did not seem to care for other folk about you. I thought so, because you had learned to understand me through your father, who knows my life so well; because you were different from most girls; because you had never turned away from me on account of my dark past; because you believed in my repentance; because,” he added, with a dryness at which a third party in the room less deeply interested might have smiled,—“because I was an old fool!”

“But you said just now——”

"That I was going to talk to you of Morris Brake," he added. "Yes, I am coming to him now. You must not get impatient. This is only the preface, so that you should think—if you do not think so already—'This man loves me, and will not advise me to anything which is not for my good.'"

Lucy's heart sank slowly. She could guess what was to follow now. He would be against her. There would be no one whom she could trust save Morris Brake.

"When I discovered your love for Morris," he said, "I was sure all was at an end as regarded any hopes of mine. And I tried to think it was well ended, Lucy."

"How did you discover——"

Again he interrupted her, as if he were afraid of some words which might escape her before he had finished his relation—as if he thought that something she might say or do would take him off his guard, and distract him from the lesson he had learned when he was in London, thinking it over. And Lucy knew he had been thinking, planning. For he had been only twenty-four hours in Skegs Shore again—had been extra busy with the



details of his farming,—and yet knew everything.

He had said so only a moment since, thought Lucy, and possibly there might have been spies abroad, and he had commissioned them to watch her. Oh no, no!—she would not think so badly of John Woodhatch. Let her wait patiently for the advice which he thought it necessary to proffer her, before misjudging him so cruelly.

“I may have guessed rather than discovered everything,” he said.

“No. You know everything. You have just told me so,” she added, as he stopped and regarded her with a strange look in his eyes.

“Everything is a wide term,” he replied, resuming his perambulations; “but I will tell you what I know, Lucy?”

“Thank you,” she answered softly.

“And it will not take long to tell,” he added grimly. “I know you love Morris Brake—that you meet him clandestinely, unwisely, and very often—that your father would as soon dream of your marrying Reuben Fladge as Morris—and that Morris is too

weak and easy to make you a good husband, even if the time should come for his position to warrant him in asking you to be his wife."

"I shall be his wife," she answered, with a bright look on her face.

"I don't see how—I don't see when. Is he relying upon me?"

"No," she answered very quickly, "he is not."

"That is as well, perhaps," he added gravely. "He must not think to base his happiness on anything that I shall do to help him."

"He does not," she cried, with the colour rising to her face. "You know how proud he is."

"Yes—I know all about him," was the low-voiced response, "and that he has not treated me fairly in this matter."

"But——"

"But," he interrupted at once, "I have no quarrel with him. I have lived too long with Morris—he has grown up too much like my own self for me not to wish him well; but I have lost my faith in him, for all that."

"Oh! John,—you must not judge him too

hardly. He thinks so much of you. You must forgive him and me together, if you consider we have in any way deceived you," she exclaimed.

"Both or none," he said. "Yes; I understand. How old are you next birthday, Lucy?"

"Eighteen."

"It is very young," he said thoughtfully, "and you are scarcely more than a child. Poor Lucy!"

"And yet you thought——"

"Yes, yes—but I was an old fool, remember," he interrupted again; "and I was prepared to wait—to give you years of grace, until you were certain I was worthy of you. There is a difference. Morris would marry you to-morrow, if you would have him."

"Dear Morris—yes!" cried the enthusiastic girl.

"Without a penny in the world—without the chance of earning one beyond the range of Farm Forlorn."

"No—no; you are mistaken there. He has a chance—he—— But do not let us speak of this," she urged; "I mustn't tell you?"

"I am not curious. I am not thinking of Morris now—only of you."

"And why trouble your head about so weak and wilful a girl as I have ever been? Oh! why do you?" she asked.

He stopped again to give emphasis to his reply.

"Because I am your friend," he answered.

"Yes, yes, I am sure of that—I am sure you will be. You have proved it in so many ways, and God knows I am not ungrateful," she murmured. "You have proved it even to-night by showing you know my poor secret, and are keeping it for my sake."

"You must not expect too much from me in that matter," he said, resuming his walk.

"You will not betray me?"

"Why is it betrayal?"

"He must not know—oh! he must not know yet," she cried.

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"I did not think you were afraid of him, Lucy."

"I am afraid of what he will say."

"Is Morris afraid too?" he asked curiously, as he came to a full stop again.

"No. I am sure he would tell him to-night, if I would let him."

"That is honest. Why is my clever little girl, who is so dutiful and patient and trustful as a rule, more afraid of fair dealing than her lover?" he inquired.

"Morris is too sanguine—too impetuous."

"Well—yes. That is true."

"And father would not forgive us—as,—as, had you been my father, I am sure you would—in time."

"In time—yes. But," he continued, "you expect me now to assist in deceiving the truest friend I have. The man I first met in Canada—and whose honesty made me honest. You expect me to do this?"

"For my sake," she urged—"for the sake of the one chance of happiness I have."

"Does no other reason strike you, Lucy?"

"N—no," she answered hesitatingly.

"Say, then, for the father's sake—first of all, for his sake."

"Yes—I had forgotten," she murmured.  
"Pray forgive me."

"It would shipwreck his life to know you had deceived him—although he would drive his ship on the rocks with his own hands, all the same," said John Woodhatch.

"Yes—that is it," said Lucy.

"What shall we tell him, then?" asked the farmer, once more beginning to tramp heavily up and down the room.

Lucy did not reply. She sat with her hands rigidly clasped together, looking straight ahead of her, like a child wondering at the strangeness of the world into which, from the misty borderland surrounding it, she had suddenly emerged. A strange world, indeed, wherein was nothing as she thought it would be, and where the happiness was problematical. She did not see to the end so clearly as she had done—there were only the thorns and pitfalls now, which the flowers had covered yesterday.

Morris was there, of course, brave and confident, to hold his strong hand out to her, but the friends whom she had known longer than Morris Brake were like dream figures in the distance receding slowly from her; presently to vanish away!

"What shall we tell him?" said John

Woodhatch for the second time as he passed her.

"I—I thought you were going to advise me what to do?" she replied.

"Not knowing what is best for yourself?"

"Not knowing what is best," she whispered back.

"Are you prepared to give Morris up?"

"No, no."

"To make him no definite promise? To tell him to wait for your final decision until——"

"Do not misunderstand me, John," she cried; "I am always prepared to go to him."

"Then I am very helpless to advise you, Lucy."

"But my father——"

"I will tell him you have refused me. That," he added, with a strange, forced smile, "I am almost twenty years too old for you."

"And—and the rest?" she asked nervously.

"For a while I am silent."

"Dear friend—true friend!" she cried, seizing his hand, which he had extended towards her. She would have raised it to her sweet young lips in very gratitude, but he held her

hands tightly too, as if he would check so extravagant an impulse.

"For the father's sake, I have said already, Lucy," he replied, "not for yours. Try and think that."

"Very well," she answered sadly.

"Presently I shall be less dazed," he said; "surer of the next step, and what *is* best."

"And then?" she asked.

"And then I will warn you before I speak to him," he answered.

"Thank you. That is like your outspoken self."

"Like a hero — eh? Almost like poor Morris," he replied.

"Poor Morris?" she said, in a low, inquiring tone.

"Well, rich Morris. Rich in your affection," he answered. "There, go to your room. Good night."

She rose at his bidding, as a child might have done, and went slowly and noiselessly across the room. He walked with her to the great oaken door, which he opened for her, and stood back with bowed head, like a gentleman of the old school. She looked at him



gratefully, sorrowfully, and yet a little fearfully, ere she passed into the broad stone passages without. There she paused, as if the impulse were strong upon her to return and say a few more words. But he did not perceive this.

He closed the door softly after her; then, crossing his hands behind his back, began again his restless, solitary walk, and tried to think it out, as in his time, and after this fashion, he had thought out—or thought he had thought!—so many abstruse problems of his life.

Was this harder and more complex? Was this beyond his finite reckoning, that the face shadowed more and more as he paced the limits of the room, and the broad, heavy brow took deeper furrows to it as he walked?

## CHAPTER IX.

### MR. AND MISS LARCOM SAY GOOD-BYE.

THE next morning Mr. Alexander Larcom sought an early opportunity of an interview with John Woodhatch. He knew the farmer was an early riser, and he found him in the fields before breakfast, looking all the brighter for his bath. John was alone, too, and busy, or apparently busy, with a bright scoop of steel at the end of a long stick—a “spud” that was as handy in uprooting young thistles from his grass land as in cutting neatly off at the base any stray mushrooms he might meet by the way, and which he would carry back in his capacious coat-pockets for Mrs. Chadderton’s ketchup.

He looked up and laughed as the Methodist minister approached him. He had thought it all out last night, and which was the best part

to play; and we, who are behind the scenes, can see he played his part well, and like a man. And if, after all, it *was* only a part—mere play-acting for the nonce—no one was particularly to blame, and only this man suffered.

“What did she say? How has it ended, John?” Mr. Larcom asked eagerly.

“Haven’t you seen Lucy?”

“Not since I left ye with her in the farm parlour last night,” he replied; “and she has—of course——”

“Stop a bit,” said Woodhatch. “Your tongue rattles on at too great a speed, Alec. It always did.”

“It’s the practees it’s had, all my life, John,” he replied quaintly; “and I’m a bit anxious. Yes, to confess the plain truth, I’m a leetle bit anxious about all this.”

“Don’t think of it any more, parson!” said John Woodhatch, laughing again. “I’m too old for her, and she knows it.”

“And is that what ye’re grinning at all the time?” inquired the other man sharply.

“Yes,” was the answer; “the folly of it strikes me this morning very plainly. Why,

Alec, I frightened her! I was old enough to be her father, I was not fit for her in any way. Old, ill-educated, rough, countrified, snatched from the streets, from the gaol, and the reformatory—what on earth was I thinking about when it struck me she was fit for me?"

"But——"

"Directly I spoke to her I was sure of my mistake," he returned. "Yes, Alec, I frightened her, poor child."

"And she refused ye?"

"She would not have had me had I been twice as rich, and half as old. And," he added, with his hand on his friend's arm, "she was quite right. I see that now as clearly as Lucy Larcom."

"She will think better of it," replied the Methodist. "Mark me, now, if she does not, John; she's a child yet."

"We will not worry about it any more; I am content."

"Ye're vary quickly settled in mind," said the other sarcastically; "and if ye're speaking the truth, ye are as changeable as a wayther-cock."

"It is quite hopeless, and I give it up."

"Wall—wa'al."

"She would have been unhappy with me, and I was thinking of her happiness," said John Woodhatch, not laughing now; "and *that* will always be my first thought."

"So it appears."

"Standing apart, I can be more her friend," he continued. "Don't you see that?"

"I don't see anything," was the blunt response.

"I don't want her to hate me," said John Woodhatch.

"There's something mair to turn Lucy against ye than I'm at the bottom of yet," said old Larcom very shrewdly.

"I'm too old—that's all. And she's too young."

"And she has deceededly told ye that ye won't suit her?"

"Decidedly, and—wisely," was the reply.

"Vary wa'al—there's an end of it; but I didn't think my only child would have meessed such a chance," he said thoughtfully—"such a vary good chance."

"She will do better, Alec. You and I have planned and potted over this like two old

fools, and without any thoughts of a pretty girl's fancies," he said, laughing again now. "She will find a young, handsome, *honest* fellow for a sweetheart, and will not begin life—the best part of her life—handicapped with me."

"And if she alters her mind?"

"If she alters her mind, and without being worried by her father," he added significantly, "why, here I am, quite ready."

"That's fair, John. Yes, that's fair," said Mr. Larcom; "though why ye didn't take it mair to heart, I don't see clairely."

"And now, don't let us talk of it any more," said John Woodhatch. "I am not broken down—I shall be just the same—I shall see you more often, perhaps—and there's an end of it."

"Vary wa'al."

"And if you don't say a word to Lucy just now I shall be glad."

"Vary wa'al," he said again. "But she's an obstinate lass—dreadful;" and after this Mr. Larcom dismissed the subject, and talked of the drive homewards that morning.

And shortly after breakfast the farmer's dog-

"We shall be seeing samething of ye soon, John," said the minister, as he shook hands also with the farmer.

"Ay—very soon," was the reply.

"Be I to go?" asked Fladge, eager to take the back seat now, and possibly seeing a pleasant change from work. Indeed, so sure was Fladge of this, that he had put one foot upwards in order to spring into the seat, when something in John Woodhatch's stern glance towards him led him to fall back with a scared expression of countenance.

"I can drive," said Greg, very confidently.

He had been standing at the door of the stackyard, generally interested in the proceedings, and had found his way to Mr. Woodhatch's side.

"You can drive?" repeated his master.  
"How's that?"

"I used to take the firewood round in the reformatory cart to the shops, before——"

"Before you tried to drive away on your own account one day—is that it?"

"Yessir."

"I remember doing it myself, and wondering if any one would buy the horse of me,"

muttered Woodhatch. "Yes, go, Greg; you can't lose your way back—the road is as straight as a line."

"Is it safe?" asked a voice in the master's ear; and turning, he found Mrs. Chadderton at his side.

Greg had heard the inquiry also, and his bead-like eyes glanced from the housekeeper to the master, and back again.

"Yes—quite safe. I can trust Greg," Woodhatch answered; and Greg took his place on the back seat, and regarded Morris and Fladge triumphantly.

There were fresh farewells, a nodding of heads and waving of hands, and then Mr. Larcom drove away with his daughter. The farm-folk melted away by degrees, Mrs. Chadderton went back into the house, the sand from the road, which the wheels of the vehicle had stirred into thick clouds of dust, drifted away across the fields or settled on the hedgerows; but John Woodhatch stood there, looking in the direction his lost love had gone, taking all light and life with her, and leaving him in a strange, neutral-tinted world.

Morris and Fladge were near him still, but



he did not notice either of them until Morris was in front of him.

"Where do you want me to go, Mr. Woodhatch?" Morris said, pretty cheerfully now, although there was an aggrieved tone in his voice.

"I don't know," was the absent answer.

"You said I had to go in another direction," remarked Morris.

He looked at the young man before him. Yes, he was a young, bright, handsome fellow enough. Why had he not noticed this before?

"Ah! in another direction, and far away from here, Morris," he said.

"For the whole day?"

"For your whole life."

Morris went back a step or two in his surprise, and John Woodhatch walked towards the house. Before he had reached the rustic wooden gate opening upon the garden-path which led straight to the front door, the master paused again.

"Come to me this evening at half-past nine, Morris—will you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Morris.

“And you, Fladge—half an hour later, please.”

“All right, sir. Ah! ha!—oh! Good Gord, Morris,” he exclaimed, as John Woodhatch walked towards the house, “he has found it out—he knows it all. We are going away—we are going away!” he screamed forth.

“Well—what of that?”

“We are——”

“Hush! Don’t make yourself an ass, Fladge,” said Morris sternly. “Let us wait and see.”

## CHAPTER X.

## MASTER AND PUPIL.

AT half-past nine to the minute, Morris Brake knocked at the panels of the parlour door. He was not a young man famous for punctuality, as a rule—a disregard of time even had been one of his besetting failings; but he was anxious now to know the worst that was in store for him. The clouds had risen suddenly about his life, and here was a barrier in his way for which he had not quite prepared. It had always been one of the “possibilities,” and to be reckoned for, but not at this period and in this sudden manner. He would have been glad to tell the truth in his own way and at his own time—just as he and Lucy had arranged to do; but time itself had forestalled him, and he was conscious, painfully conscious, that he should cut but a sorry

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figure in the light which John Woodhatch had suddenly turned on him.

Still, he was no coward; let him face it out, and then an end to it. There was something manly in the way in which he entered the room at the bidding from within, and came towards the master with unfaltering step, and an eye that flinched not at the steady gaze bent on him. John Woodhatch was sitting by the fireside, with his hands spread out before the flame; the autumn would be a short one, and the winter come earlier than usual across the sea, John Woodhatch thought, for there were signs of a cruel frost already, even in that room.

"Take a seat, Morris," he said calmly; and Morris sat down facing him.

"We may as well get at once to business," said John Woodhatch, "and then discuss the matter of your conduct afterwards."

"My conduct, sir!" repeated the other warmly.

"Ah! you need not lose your temper quite so quickly, Morris," said the elder man sadly. "I shall have harsher words to say in a few moments."

"I will try and bear them," answered Morris.

"Yes—do," was the reply, "for you are headstrong and hasty, and see matters only clearly afterwards."

Morris slightly inclined his head, either in assent, or as significant that he was simply listening.

John Woodhatch took a sealed envelope from his pocket.

"Here is your money, with something over to make up for your unceremonious departure, Morris. You will find it quite correct."

"Thank you. I am sure of that;" and Morris put the envelope in the breast-pocket of his coat.

"You will go away to-night, if you can, or to-morrow morning early," he added. "You will easily find a berth as farm bailiff, overlooker—anything. You are intelligent, industrious, quick, to be trusted in all business or money matters thoroughly. I can say as much, or more than this for you."

"I shall not trouble you for a reference as to character," said Morris quietly; but the

composure was forced, and Morris had turned very white.

"As you please. You are well known within twenty miles round of Skegs Shore, and there are many who would be glad of your services."

"I am aware of it."

His listener simply nodded. He betrayed no astonishment, as Morris had expected. Nothing seemed to surprise Mr. Woodhatch, or else the future actions of his pupil did not in any way arouse his interest; and yet all that this young fellow did would affect for ever the life of the girl to whom he had said good-bye that morning. If he were surprised or disheartened, it was not on the cards that he should betray any emotion to Morris Brake.

"And now, having settled these business details, how long have you been in love with Larcom's daughter?" he said, after a little pause.

"Two years, perhaps."

"When she was not sixteen!"

"Well—yes."

"And you think yourself worthy of her?"

"I do not think there is any one worthy of

her in the whole world," said Morris enthusiastically.

"I am glad you think so. I was of the same opinion once."

"Yes—I know," said Morris in a subdued tone.

"She has told you," said John Woodhatch; "that is natural enough. All her hopes and fears were shared by you, and I was one of her fears. Natural enough also; but you could both have trusted me earlier, without much danger, even with more safety."

"We were not afraid of your opposition, sir."

"Of Mr. Larcom's?"

"Yes."

"I might have advised you, although I am beginning to think my advice is not worth much, and other people's is much better," he added, with a short, hard laugh, "and that life altogether—such a life as mine is—is an utter failure."

"I hope not, sir."

"All that I set my hand to withers very quickly," said John Woodhatch, "and my efforts to do good become a weak and vain

philanthropy. For years I have prided myself upon my knowledge of character, and now I am deceived at every turn. *You* have deceived me."

"No, sir—I cannot think so. I am sorry you do."

"It has not been a straightforward bit of business with me from the beginning; there has been nothing but deceit. You have told me many a lie to get to her—you have taught her to lie to get to you."

"Mr. Woodhatch!"

"Oh! it's true enough, and very pitiable, and yet only human nature in the shade," said the master; "but it would have been as well to tell me all."

"That seems the grievance," replied Morris. "And yet there were so many reasons why we should not."

"Don't tell me them; I do not care to hear them. They would take too much of the conceit out of me," he said. "Where's Greg?"

It was a question that startled Morris by its irrelevancy, but he answered—

"He has gone to his room."



"He has come back, then. Mrs. Chadderton was sure it was not safe to trust him. I was right for once, you see; and if Greg Dorward turns out the best of the lot of you, I shall not be very much surprised. And, by God, he cannot turn out worse!"

"We shall see," said Morris; "and, at all events, I do not understand why I should be included in your flock of black sheep."

"No, no—you are a gentleman's son, and have all a gentleman's fine notions," said John Woodhatch; "and Greg comes from the thieves' dens and the dark streets like his master. But I doubt if he would steal in and out of my house at all hours of the night, and get poor Fladge to watch for him and play the spy for him, and make sure it was all safe before risking his own detection!"

"It is you who have played the spy on me, Mr. Woodhatch," cried the other, passionately now. "I have been watched, I see, and I know who it is whom you have set to watch me."

"Who?" asked Woodhatch.

"Mrs. Chadderton."

"A worthy woman, and faithful to her

master," was the grave response. "Let us leave her out of the argument, Morris—it will be as well."

"Oh! she is another of your penitents, I know; but I ought to have been as wary of her as of you, or the rest of them. You are all from the gaol; I am the only honest one amongst you. It was for my sister's sake, for Lucy's sake, I have stopped here so long," he exclaimed. "This is a reformatory, not a farm. Why should I want to share this life with you any longer?—what is it to do with me?"

"Ay—we are from the gaol, most of us; we do not disguise it," answered the other. "I was the first to call your attention to it to-night, remember, and you have only taken up the cue. And to rescue from the gaol, to snatch at times some weak, erring soul from the very jaws of hell, is the duty, the penance even, which I have set myself. What duty in life is yours, Morris Brake, that you will carry out, or when it is fulfilled, God will say, 'Well done'?"

He was standing up now, with his eyes ablaze and his lips set somewhat closely.

Morris's passion died out at sight of his, and was changed into something very like remorse.

"Forgive me, sir—forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to say so much as this; but you were very hard. Why should you be so unforgiving to me?"

"I have told you."

"You have not told me all. There is something more in your thoughts against me to account for this. I am sure of it."

"I have told all that is necessary—at present."

"Mr. Woodhatch, this is not just to me," said Morris. "Have you told her everything?"

"Lucy, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"I said last night I knew everything; that was sufficient. She did not ask me what I knew, or I could have told her my love for her was too great to wound her by a word, and that I was trying very hard to make the best of it, and not think badly of her, even at the worst."

“Ah! dear old master, you do not know everything,” said Morris. “You have been told only half the truth, and Lucy, as I wished, has left the other half to me. You have misjudged us both. She is my wife!”

## CHAPTER XI.

“WILL YOU DO ME A FAVOUR?”

JOHN WOODHATCH had not known everything after all. Here was a *coup de théâtre* for which he was wholly unprepared. A shrewd, observant man as he was by nature, and under whose feet the grass did not grow quickly, still he was not infallible; and, as a judge of human character, he had, as we are aware, begun to think himself a failure.

In this instance he had not calculated upon headstrong youth, or the romance of selfishness leading up to this; or the power of Morris Brake and Lucy to deceive him and all connected with him thus completely.

“Your wife?” he repeated slowly to himself. Then he sat down, planted his big hands upon his knees, and stared at the fire, as though the solution to the enigma was to be found in its red depths.

"Yes; we have been married a few weeks," Morris explained. "When you were away in London we—we thought it was best."

"Why?"

"We knew there would be much opposition," he said; "that Mr. Larcom would not give his consent; that you—even with all your kindness of heart—would side against us, and tell us to wait."

"Yes, I should have done so," answered the master slowly.

"There seemed no one on our side," Morris continued. "We felt every effort would be made to part us; that the truth was coming to the light, and there was only security in marriage. We loved each other very much, sir."

"Poor children! rash children!" muttered Woodhatch. "Yes, this is love, I suppose—the love of youth which leaps in the dark to the unalterable. How old are you?"

"I shall be twenty-one next summer, sir."

"Twenty years of age only," said Woodhatch to himself.

"In my twenty-first year," corrected Morris, objecting to his first score very strongly, and

anxious to be out of it even for argument's sake. There was a tremendous difference between twenty and twenty-one—even the law acknowledged that. And when John Woodhatch added in his new dreamy manner, "I remember last March you told me you were nineteen," Morris felt absolutely baby-like, and thought it was a very ugly way of mentioning an indisputable fact. At least, he was twenty last July, and should be of age next year, although John Woodhatch did not seem to see it.

"And Lucy—is she eighteen yet? I forget."

He had only asked her last night the same question, and she had answered it.

"Well, she is just upon it, sir."

"Yes, next November; I had forgotten for a moment. Nineteen and seventeen; boy and girl," he said.

"I really am not nineteen, Mr. Woodhatch. I wish you wouldn't——"

"And now," he said, interrupting him, "sit down and tell me what are your plans? The crisis is passed; you have accepted the responsibilities of life. What will you do to make her happy?"

Morris hesitated, and looked in the fire in his turn.

"You may trust me, Morris," said the master.

"I know that, sir; I could trust you with my life."

"The storm is over, and you and I are sitting in the sunshine," he said, with a sickly smile that was not indicative of any brightness; we have no ill feeling at our hearts. What are you going to do?"

"I will tell you what I thought of doing," Morris said. "You know I am rather clever at horses; understand them, and their value?"

"You are clever, though I haven't said as much before," replied Woodhatch.

"Well, sir," Morris said, looking down now and in a rather shamefaced way, "Scatterwait has offered me a good position in his service, and with many chances of advancement."

"Scatterwait is not a nice man," was the master's remark.

"I know that. That is why——"

"But he is rich, the owner of famous race-horses, a great horse-dealer altogether, and better known in Lincoln than the bishop. And



you would suit him, after a while," added John Woodhatch.

"Yes, I thought so."

"You will travel about England a great deal," he continued ; "half over the world, perhaps."

"Yes ; it is not a bad life."

"And Lucy—what of the young wife ? "

"Oh ! we have thought of all this, sir," replied Morris, "although I have been awfully hasty, and told you our secret prematurely ; but then you were so hard on me and her."

"The past lies far away from us ; years back, it seems, Morris. Go on."

"We thought of waiting till things were a bit settled, till I had saved some money, and then beginning housekeeping together later on, telling Mr. Larcom of our marriage, and asking his forgiveness. In a year, or two at the most, I should know exactly what to do."

"In a year or two ! Has it not struck you, Morris, what these two years would be to Lucy, occupying a false position in her home, and your wandering about the world without

her? Have you had no thought for that?" he cried; "has not she?"

"It was the best we could think of," was the answer. "We are young, and there is time before us, and we have faith in each other," he added confidently.

Mr. Woodhatch's brow contracted, but possibly it was only at the fire.

"Your plans, Morris, are on a par with this secret marriage—very weak and foolish," he said slowly. "You do not look ahead and see the misery and horror of it all. You see it as a dreamer. It must not be."

"Must not?"

"It must not," he repeated, rising; and, Morris taking it as a hint that the interview was at an end, rose also. "There can come no happiness to such a life, and there must follow discord, jealousy, perhaps hate. It is a false position for you both—an accursed snare, and shall not be."

"Oh, sir, you have no confidence in me, I know."

"You have begun life early; but, by God, Morris Brake, you shall begin it with your wife," cried Woodhatch savagely.

"If I only could; if in any way I could!"

"I will find out the way. You must exist without that Scatterwait."

"I thought he——"

"Don't think of the fellow again," said Woodhatch. "And now get away, and write to me to-morrow where you are. I shall be glad when you are out of the house," he said bluntly; "I shall breathe more freely."

"Ah, Mr. Woodhatch, you look upon me still as the man who has deceived you, instead of one who, all his life, has looked up to you as father, friend, adviser," said Morris earnestly. "That I have loved Lucy, is my only sin against you. Will you not look over that?"

"Will you do me a favour?" asked John Woodhatch suddenly.

"Anything — everything — that is in my power. Yes."

"When you go away to-morrow morning, take Fladge with you."

"Fladge!"

"When you have begun the world for yourself, find a humble corner in it for him; he has been your friend, and served you well from

your point of view. And you must not be ungrateful."

"I am quite willing, sir. But——"

"Come forward, Fladge, and thank him. Don't stand glaring there, lad," said John Woodhatch.

It was Reuben Fladge who had knocked softly without, and then crept into the room, true to his time, only a moment since, and when Morris was standing with his back to him. Fladge had closed the door behind him, and stood still at the mention of his name, with the fingers of his right hand pressed against his teeth, in a highly nervous manner. In the distance he looked as white and scared as if a ghost were facing him ; and his other hand groped backwards in search of the handle of the door, which he was half inclined to open again, and then fly shrieking into the passage. But when he had heard and comprehended John Woodhatch's meaning, and Morris's answer, with a cry like a wild animal's, he ran forwards and fell upon his knees in front of his master, clasping him round with trembling hands.

"Oh, don't send me away, for mercy's

sake! anything but that, sir. Don't send me from the farm; don't—don't!" he cried.

"Hush! you are making too much noise, Fladge. Get up," said Woodhatch, backing a step or two in order to disengage himself from Reuben's clutch, but only dragging the ungainly youth upon his knees along with him.

"Not till you say you have forgiven me, and I may stop. For God's love, master, let me stop with you. Pray, do!"

John Woodhatch reached out his big hand and patted the rough head of the suppliant as he might have done a dog's, and said—

"It is for your good, Fladge; and you like Morris."

"I shall always hate him now," he cried, looking back at Morris with a glance very expressive of his assertion. "He led me on, and gave me money, and made me watch for him—watch you and everybody—and I hate him. There!"

"He will be your friend."

"No, he won't—no, he won't!"

"And, Fladge, you must go away from here," said John Woodhatch very firmly; "I have quite made up my mind about it."

"Oh! don't say it again—don't say it!"

"Get up, and listen to me," said his master.

Reuben Fladge staggered to his feet, went back to the wall and leaned against it, panting hard as though he had been running. He never took his gaze from the master's face until all had been said, and he had understood all.

"I have no ill will against you, Fladge," said John Woodhatch. "I am going to transfer you to one in whose service you will be useful; if you are not, I will pay your wages instead of Morris here."

"Fladge will be useful enough, sir," said Morris; "he and I will get on together very well."

Fladge did not look towards him, and did not seem to hear. He was awaiting his sentence of banishment from the master, and consolation from the lips of Morris Brake was of no benefit or comfort to him.

"Perhaps you don't know good from harm so well as most folk," said John Woodhatch, "and it did not seem so great a fault to plot with him against me."

"Not against you, sir," cried Morris Brake at this.

"I think it was. At all events, you were both deceiving me, and that was like a plot. And," he continued, "like a wrong—which I have forgiven."

Fladge left his place by the wall, and came on again with hands outstretched. Forgiveness, at least, he comprehended.

"But bearing you no ill will," added John Woodhatch, "hoping to be the friend of both of you, still I would set you as far apart from my life as it is possible. I could not see under my roof either you or Morris Brake, Fladge—I could not bear to meet either of you day by day, and every time I met you to think, 'This one worked in the dark against me.' You must go."

"Oh! master," wailed forth Fladge, "what was I before you knew me—what shall I be again?"

"You are almost a man—you know right from wrong—you will keep strong now, Fladge."

"Not if you drive me from this house," was the sullen answer.

"You will go away to-morrow," answered Woodhatch sternly.

Yes, there were some things which John Woodhatch never forgave, it appeared—and they were sins against himself! He was no hero—hardly a good man, when his pride was touched, thought Morris Brake, as he moved towards the door, followed by Fladge.

The interview was over, the decree of banishment had been promulgated, and there were to be great changes at Farm Forlorn—greater than any of the three were dreaming of in that hour. Morris opened the door, and Fladge, munching again at his finger-tips, slouched after him. There was a hurried scuffling in the corridor, the slamming of a door somewhere near, and Morris stepped out quickly. But the oil lamps had been extinguished for the night, and all was dark without.

"There are more watchers and eavesdroppers on the premises," said Morris, turning to John Woodhatch again.

"I don't think so," was the master's reply, as he took his old seat by the fire.

"Some one hurried down the passage just now," said Morris; "I would swear to that."

"Carlo is loose," replied the farmer.



"So is Mrs. Chadderton," muttered Morris, shrugging his shoulders; then in a louder tone he added, "Good night, sir."

"Good night, Morris. You will let me know to-morrow where you are."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"Thank *you!*" he added with emphasis. "Good night, Fladge."

"God bless you, master," was the answer, in lieu of the usual response; and then the door closed and John Woodhatch was alone.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MRS. CHADDERTON IS WATCHFUL.

THE master of Farm Forlorn was a man easily disturbed, and who did not take life with philosophic calmness, although, like most would-be philosophers, he imagined his self-possession bordered almost upon genius. He whom most events of any importance easily disturbed, was possessed of the idea that nothing short of an earthquake could move him. True it was he did not betray very quickly the trouble at his heart or brain, and he could certainly assume a composure he was far from feeling ; but he suffered none the less from the consciousness that those by whom he was surrounded did not know how much he suffered.

And that particular night he was particularly restless. There had happened so much

within the last thirty hours—life had appeared to change so quickly with him and bring about so many wondrous changes too. He could not sleep—what was the use of going to his room and trying to sleep? He had made that attempt last night, and with indifferent success, and now there was more to think about, and keep him wide-awake and staring. Yesternight he had been fool enough to propose to a girl who was already married, and who did not tell him even then of the reason why it was impossible she could accept him. To-night Morris Brake had owned he was her husband. What was to follow this avowal?—and how should he set this young rash couple up in the world, and on the smooth, straight path which should lead to the happiness of both of them? For he intended to do that; a little for Morris's sake, perhaps, but for Lucy's a great deal. There would have come only unhappiness to Lucy, if Morris had accepted the situation which had been offered to him by that sharp-witted, unprincipled, wealthy horse-jobber named Scatterwait. Morris should never go to Scatterwait's, he swore it.

He put more coals upon the fire, drew his chair close to the hearth, lighted his pipe, and composed himself to think very deeply of the new surroundings of his life ; of Morris and Lucy, of the misery of Fladge, of Greg—very unaccountably of Greg, the last of a series of experiments, all of which had not turned out profitably or as he had arranged they should do. Yes, he was a man of many failures ; he confessed it again sitting there !

How long he sat thinking he never knew. He sat the fire out, and was unaware that it had grown black ; the oil lamp was burning low, and the keen cold air was stealing into the room ; the night was so still, that the breaking of the sea upon the coast three-quarters of a mile away, came like a low and muffled moaning in the distance, and the wind around the house was crying like a child.

Softly the door opened, and a figure in black and draped in a thick black shawl, which hung about her head and shoulders in a strange fantastic fashion, stole into the room, her thick list slippers emitting no sound.

“ Master,” said the harsh voice of Mrs. Chadderton, “ you are in trouble to-night.”

He was not startled at her appearance—his nerves, at least, were proof against little surprises which would have brought the hearts into the mouths of timid folk; or else he was pretty well accustomed to Mrs. Chadderton's habit of stealing about the premises at night, under the suspicion that all was not safe at Farm Forlorn, and the security of the establishment depended solely on her extra vigilance.

And it was a figure at which even a moderately strong-minded man might have jumped back a little—the drapery was so black and voluminous, she looked altogether so shadowy, and her pale, grim white face was almost spectral as it gleamed from the folds of the shawl about her head.

“I can't say it is trouble, Mrs. Chadderton,” he said.

“What is it, then?” she asked, almost peremptorily, as if she had a right to know.

“I am not sleepy, that's all.”

“Ah! that will not do for Ann Chadderton,” she said; “that is an evasion.”

“There are going to be many changes at Farm Forlorn, then, and I can't rest for

thinking of them," he continued. "Will that do for an explanation?"

"And the changes are——"

She paused to allow him to proceed with his statement.

"Morris and Fladge are going away."

"I can guess why."

"Yes, you can guess why."

"Do they suspect me in any way?"

"I think they do. I am sure they do," was the answer.

"Is it well to part with Morris?"

"Yes."

"He seems to have been a companion to you. Almost a son."

Woodhatch shuddered.

"And you have been drawn strangely to him. He has made the farm lighter and brighter by his presence," she continued.

"Why do you plead for him?" asked Woodhatch roughly. "He is not fond of you."

"I know it."

"Or of anybody, save himself and——"

"The Methodist parson's daughter," concluded Mrs. Chadderton.

"Yes—that's all."

"I do not care for his likes or dislikes ; but I know the master is cheered by his presence, and will be unhappy when he is thrown upon the world," she said.

"You know too much, my wise woman of Skegs Shore," said John Woodhatch ironically.

"No ; too little," she added, with a sigh.

John Woodhatch proceeded to fill a pipe with tobacco, and Mrs. Chadderton watched the process solicitously.

"Will you not go to your room now ?—it is very late."

"What time is it ? "

"Past one."

"I did not know it was so late."

"Shall I take the lamp into your apartment ? " she inquired.

"No ; leave it alone," he answered petulantly, "and get to bed."

"I am always the last up in the house, you know," she said. "I should not rest if I were certain any one was left downstairs," she added gravely.

"Then you will not rest to-night, Mrs. Chadderton."

"It does not matter."

"And why are you wandering about the premises in this fashion? Is there anything more amiss?" he asked.

"No; all is very quiet to-night."

"Have you been out of the farm?" he asked.

"Yes, as usual."

"And the lights in the windows looking on the garden?"

"They are all out, excepting in Morris's room."

"Ah! you need not watch there," said Mr. Woodhatch; "he is packing up to go away to-morrow."

"It is a pity," she replied. "But you should know best—you so wise, and I so poor and ignorant; you so good, and I so bad."

"The bad times are in the background, Mrs. Chadderton."

"Ah! but I don't forget them. I——"

"There, there, don't trouble me about them to-night. Haven't I enough trouble of my own?" he cried.

"You said it was not trouble," she answered very quickly.



"Did I?"

"Oh! master, you are grieving for that girl," she cried passionately, "and she is not worthy of you in any way. She is too young, too frivolous, too much in love with Morris Brake, too weak and vain altogether for such a man as you are. Don't think of her any more; pray don't. If you give way—you, so strong and brave and good—what will become of us? Of *all* of us?"

"Mrs. Chadderton, you're a troublesome old screech-owl; go to your roost and leave a man in peace," he answered, half in jest and half in earnest.

"You will not sit up much longer?"

"When my pipe is out. There, that's a promise. Now go away. 'Hook it,' as Greg would say."

"Greg! is he upon your mind too?"

"No, he isn't," was the answer. "And now good night to you."

"Good night, sir."

Mrs. Chadderton curtsied low, and went noiselessly out of the room, closing the door very carefully after her. She went along the corridor and up the stairs, along the second

corridor and up the stairs again, listening in the darkness at the doors as she passed, and stopping a longer time than usual at the door of the room which Greg Dorward shared with Morris Brake and Fladge.

When she was quite satisfied that all was well, she stole downstairs to her own room on the first floor again, where a light was burning, and here she sat and waited for the master's footsteps, which she hoped shortly to hear tramping heavily along the corridor to the room beyond her own. It was a large room that of Mrs. Chadderton's, with big beams crossing the low ceiling; a room full of odd corners with deep shadows lurking in them. Mrs. Chadderton did not fall asleep, or attempt to read and thus while away the time at her disposal, supposing she were fixed in her intention to see the last of Mr. Woodhatch before she retired finally to rest. She simply sat and stared at the opposite wall, unmindful of the shawl in which she had wrapped herself before entering the garden that night, and presented thus so weird an aspect that had any one attempted to surprise Mrs. Chadderton by an unlooked-for visit, he or she might have

been startled almost out of life by her grim set face and statuesque deportment.

Presently a clock, somewhere in the house, struck two; and, like a being regulated by clockwork, or who had been waiting very patiently for that hour to strike, she rose to her feet and went quietly and methodically out of the room, along the corridor, down the stairs, and to the master's parlour again to remind him of his promise to her.

She knocked very softly, and receiving no permission to enter, entered for herself. The wick within the lamp was flickering and spluttering, and the light was fitful and unequal, but sufficient to show that John Woodhatch was no longer in the room. The chair in which she had seen him last, and from which he had taunted her and given her hard words—so unlike him always this!—was empty, and the long clay pipe lay broken in pieces upon the hearthrug, as though its late owner had dashed it to the floor before rising and passing out into the garden. For the glass doors of the window were wide open—the blind had been pulled up, the heavy red curtains drawn aside, and beyond was the

dark expanse of garden-ground, and a black sky lit with stars.

Where could he have gone and how long had he been gone? What was there to watch now all was known, and the motive for Morris Brake's night flittings fairly confessed? And why should the master take it upon himself to watch, she wondered, when she had watched for him so faithfully?

Mrs. Chadderton walked to the window and peered forth; she stepped into the garden, looked right and left, and listened for voices, or the sound of footsteps, glanced up at the long line of stone-work and house-roof, and saw only the one light from her own room glimmering from the diamond panes. She stepped back into the house, and sat down with her white face turned to the open window, and her long, steady stare beyond it, waiting patiently and gravely for John Woodhatch to come back.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## IN THE EARLY MORNING.

THE Reverend Alexander Larcom—sometimes very irreverently styled “Old Alec,” even by John Woodhatch—lived in a little, one-storied house some two and a half miles from Farm Forlorn. A neat little prim edifice was Mr. Larcom’s residence, and situated next door to his own chapel—Zion Chapel—which was a house of the same dimensions as his own, and with no pretensions in any way to a chapel-like appearance, unless the name painted in white letters on a little black board, which was nailed over the front door, was significant of a place of public worship. It was a very primitive place of worship certainly, a good half-mile past the railway station at which Greg had arrived early in the week, and with fen-land and field stretching before it in one vast

expanse, intersected by narrow deep canals of shining water which the eye could follow for miles into the green heart of Lincolnshire. And behind Zion Chapel and its minister's house the fields grew scantier and scantier of herbage, becoming more gritty and sandy with every step, until the long, low-lying coast was reached, and the boundary finished by the grey, restless sea, which no sunshine ever brightened into colour.

Whence Alexander Larcom obtained his congregation, it was very difficult to conjecture at first sight; there were a few cottages round about the station, and a church among the cottages huge enough to hold half Lincolnshire, and to which those of the villagers who were orthodox went morning and afternoon on Sabbath days, and dozed and nodded their heads in the big pews to much indifferent maunderings from a toothless rector, who was continually losing his place and coming to full stops. Mr. Larcom, at daggers drawn with the church, and, being disputatious, with a fair number of church-folk, did not expect, and had not accommodation for, a large congregation; twenty full-sized Lincolnshire folk, who

are generally full-sized and with a tendency to squareness, filled his front room comfortably; thirty or thirty-five crowded Zion Chapel to suffocation; and fifty necessitated the opening of the window and the placing of a school form in the front garden under it, amongst some very bright nasturtiums, where the supplementary members of the flock could listen comfortably and coolly. With the regular portion of his congregation Alexander Larcom was a favourite. He was a contrast to the rector of Skegs Shore, and when the window of his chapel was open, and the wind fairly in the west, you could hear him at the railway station. A curious gentleman in the train, which stopped one Sunday afternoon at Skegs Shore, had, it was rumoured, popped his head out of the window and asked "if there was a row on anywhere;" but this was only rumour, and, as told by the churchwardens of St. Mungo—who did not like Mr. Larcom—hardly to be relied upon implicitly.

Nevertheless Alexander Larcom was a vigorous preacher, a rough and ready hard-hitter, a man who said sharp things to sinners, and was "downright" in everything. He was eccen-

tric, but he was in earnest ; he spoke more of justice than mercy, of hell than heaven, and nervous folk quickly dropped attending ; but he had his faithful little band of followers, who thought there was not a better preacher in the world, bar Spurgeon and the Pope of Rome. Odd stragglers, who liked his style of argument, would come miles to hear him pray and preach. John Woodhatch came for one, although spiteful people said *he* only came out of compliment, or to pay court to the Methodist's daughter after service, and in the next house where he would stay to dinner very often.

And now Alexander Larcom and daughter were at home again, and their watch and ward of Farm Forlorn over for the season. What a deal had happened since they went away ! and what a deal more, of which the Methodist had not dreamed—he who was standing on the brink of discovery, and would presently look down into the depths !

He and Lucy had not exchanged many words in their drive home together ; their thoughts were deep, and not in unison ; or else the presence of Greg in the background checked any tendency to an exchange of con-



fidences. Besides, the father did not know what to say, though he might imply a great deal presently, and hint he was a disappointed man.

“If you will not say a word to Lucy about this, I shall be glad,” were almost John Woodhatch’s parting words, and he had promised to be silent. But John Woodhatch was very rich, very good, not very old; and was one of the few men with whom he had ever got on when brought into personal contact. And he, Alec Larcom, was very poor—and, though he did not know it, very proud and dogmatic—and when he died, it had been often in his mind, like a thoughtful sire, what would become of Lucy?

If he had only known that Lucy had, to the best of her ability, rashly settled this little problem for herself, it would have been better for them both; but Lucy, although loving her father, was very much afraid of him. He had been an affectionate father in his dry, hard way; but he had always treated her like a child—as one who could not be expected, at her age, to have any will of her own. Lucy’s mother had done very well without one, and

so would Lucy ; taking it for granted, and as a gospel truth, that he would always advise her for the best, and be sure also what was the best for her. There being no mistake about this, what could Lucy possibly want with a will of her own, any more than her poor mother ? She had a wise father, there was very little doubt about that ; and a will of her own was a perfect and unnecessary superfluity, thought Mr. Larcom.

He would have been glad of a long talk with her, had he not been tied down by his promise to the owner of Farm Forlorn ; he should have liked to be fully acquainted with each and every reason for Lucy's declining such an eligible offer of marriage as had been made her, and with his full consent, too, a favour always exceedingly difficult to secure. And he would know every reason too, trust him !

Hence, though not a word was said that day, or in the long evening afterwards, and when Greg had driven home with the farmer's trap, there was a dulness, a constraint, a reserve between father and daughter, each thinking of the same subject, and each endeavouring to ignore it. Both were glad when the hour

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was late, and it was time to say "good night," after Alec Larcom had read aloud from the Bible a chapter which seemed particularly levelled at Lucy, and her disregard of parental authority, and which the father, deep in Bible texts, had doubtless especially picked out for her. It was as though he had his own suspicions of the motive which had led her to tell John Woodhatch all thought of her was hopeless. Was he very near the truth? She was afraid of the result of the revelation—her father being prone to regard matters unjustly sometimes, despite his religious feelings—and dreaded what he would say of her when the truth was known. What would he think? What could he think? She was strong of will, and she loved Morris Brake too well not to fight his battles, and share misery and poverty with him if it were needed, but it was waiting for the truth which seemed to unnerve her that night. And Alexander Larcom, despising deceit, and waiting for the truth too, was as gloomy and wakeful as the man we saw last at Forlorn Farm, thinking it out and arranging for the morrow.

Presently the lights were extinguished in

the little cottage, the night stole on and died away, the late dawn came up across the sea, a luggage-train or two went shrieking by in the distance, the long, straight bands of silver in the landscape began to glitter in the daylight, the birds were full of song, the big, black cattle were lowing in the fields, and the first signs of labour for the day were marked by the rattle, rattle of horses' hoofs advancing from some distant point to the regions of Skegs Shore.

Suddenly there was a stoppage of wheels, a noisy shout from some one, a bellowing and roaring as of a man in great surprise, and who was eager to communicate to the living souls about there the horror which had met him by the way.

"Oh, lor! Here!—hoy! hi! Look here—look here! Help! Murder!"

The shouting woke up Alexander Larcom, who flung up his window and peered out.

"What is it, man, ye're blating at? What's the matter with ye?"

"Murder's the matter, master! Come down; make haste!"

"Murder!"

“ Yes. Here’s a dead man in the road, sure enough,” cried the rustic.

Ay, sure enough ; for death had been busy in the night, and left its victim in the deep dust of the roadway.

Tragedy had come with an awful suddenness to Skegs Shore.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### POOR MORRIS.

MURDER! To think that in so quiet and out-of-the-way spot as Skegs Shore there should have happened this dire tragedy! So quiet and peaceful a place as it had been till that day; with its inhabitants steeped in rural dulness, and vegetating out their time on earth with but little to disturb the tenor of their lives.

And now, a strange and bloody murder to excite this peaceful neighbourhood; and what at first sight appeared to be a singularly motiveless deed of violence altogether. For what man or woman in Lincolnshire had a grudge against young Morris Brake?—for it was he, lying stiff and stark in the roadway, struck down as by the blow of an assassin, with his white face turned to God's heaven,

as if protesting against being hurled from existence in the beginning of his hopes, and with the fair promise of happiness advancing.

There was a doubt if he were dead at first, until the waggoner and Mr. Larcom, who had hastened half-dressed from the cottage, had attempted to raise him in their arms; and then it was terribly evident that the end had come to this young life.

“Good Lord! it’s Morris Brake, of Farm Forlorn,” said the Methodist. “What did he want this way, I wonder? Poor lad! poor lad! But this is awful news to take to John Woodhatch and the rest of them.”

“Where be he to go?” asked the waggoner, shaking with fright. “Shall I be hanged, sir, for coming nigh him first? Oh, lor! oh, lor! won’t they think I did it?”

“Don’t make that bellowing; ye’re safe enough. Help me lift the body into the chapel; it will be out of the way there for the present. To think that it is young Morris Brake, of all poor souls now!”

They carried the body into the little Methodist chapel, the door of which Mr. Larcom had unlocked, and placed it gently down upon

the floor—a strange and gruesome sight there in the early morning, and with the sunlight coming through the windows full upon it. Mr. Larcom drew down the blinds, put his handkerchief over the grave still face, and came out again into the fresh air with the man who had assisted him.

“I’m thinking a soop of whiskey won’t hurt us now, before we take the news into the village,” said Mr. Larcom, shuddering with cold. “What d’ye think?”

The waggoner thought so also, and stood and scratched his head, until Mr. Larcom reappeared from the house with the stimulant he had suggested, and which he shared with the bewildered rustic. He had got his coat and felt hat on now, and his stick and the key of the chapel next door were in his hands, as well as the glass of whiskey. He had been up to the door of Lucy’s room, and listened; but all was still, and she was sleeping very soundly, and had not responded to the first soft knocking at the door.

“I’m thinking she had better know of this when I come back,” he said half aloud; and the man opened his mouth and asked,



"What!" as though the observation had been addressed to him.

"My daughter I was thinking aboot," said Mr. Larcom in reply; "I wasn't talking to ye, man. Time enough for such a horror as that to scare a poor lass, surely. Come along; we're wasting time."

And then Mr. Larcom, and the man with the waggon and horses, went away to deliver the news to all whom it might concern; and, presently, there was much bustle in the village, some running to and fro, a turning out by degrees of men, women, and children into the sunshine, and to the middle of the village street, and round the big pump which was there, and where Alec Larcom told the story of the discovery of the body of Morris Brake before his very door, and seemed half disposed to burst into a sermon upon it, and improve the opportunity.

When he walked back towards his house again, the whole of the village was at his heels; and the parish clerk, the landlord of the Swan, and the station-master at Skegs Shore, walked by his side, all excited and full of questions, which no human being could

possibly answer, and of surmises, which were worth less than nothing, as to the motive of the deed. The landlord of the Swan had heard footsteps in the night, the footsteps of more than one person passing through the village, he said; had wondered who was out so late, and had thought of getting up to look through the window, if his wife had not said he was a fool to expect to see anything on so dark a night. Therefore he had gone to sleep again, and should have thought no more about it, had not Mr. Larcom put it into his head by such awful news.

The noise of many voices in the road without—where the blood was, and people staring down at it as if some proof might come there by incessant staring, as to how it had been villainously spilt—startled Lucy, to whom the world was a bright and pleasant place for two more fleeting minutes of her life.

The young girl, dressing her fair hair at her glass, paused to listen to the mutterings of her neighbours, and to marvel at them; then she stood up and drew the blind aside, and peered out with wondering blue eyes, which grew larger and larger as she gazed.

Something had happened to her father, and they were coming to tell her, was her first surmise ; and then she saw Mr. Larcom the central figure in the crowd, gesticulating and explaining, and as excited as the rest of them, and people hurrying on in advance of him, and coming rapidly towards the house. Some of them were already before it, looking up at the window, or standing in a group, and gazing intently at the roadway ; others pushing into the little patch of garden-ground, and trying to peer under the blind into the chapel itself, where a robbery might have been committed, of the hymn-books perhaps, or even the harmonium, at which she presided. One man on horseback, she noticed, dashed up to Mr. Larcom, received some hasty instructions, and then dashed off again at full speed ; and all the dogs in Skegs Shore were following their masters and barking at each other, all the news perhaps ; some laughing at it, and with their tongues out, like very heartless dogs indeed.

Lucy was dressed and in the garden as her father reached the house, passed it, and opened the garden gate next door.

"Father, what is it?" she exclaimed.  
"What is the matter?"

Mr. Larcom waved his hands to her to keep back.

"Go into the house, Lucy; this is no place for ye, lass."

"But——"

"I am coming in directly—in a few minutes; there's bad news. Go indoors," he shouted. But she did not move, did not seem to heed him. "Go indoors, I say, and wait for me."

She stood there like a statue. Some one in the crowd of villagers had surely mentioned the name of one who was dearer to her than the whole world; besides, she could not have been dreaming—his name *was* said. The voice of a child, eager to be the first to tell the news in a quarter where it had not reached, had called forth "Morris Brake," and half a dozen folk had yelled forth, "Murdered;" and so the truth had been fired at her, as from a cannon's mouth, and in spite of Mr. Larcom's vain precautions.

She knew it all; she knew the whole awful truth at once; a voice from heaven could not have more surely told her Morris was dead,

and lying in the chapel, where the villagers were struggling in to see the show, and would have no denial of such a sight as that for all the opposition of the parson, who tried to keep them out, and was carried in along with them.

How she came to be one of the chapel crowd, too, she did not know—she never knew; but she was in their midst, shrieking for them to make way, to let her see if it were Morris—if it were possible there could be such a dreadful truth on God's earth, and she alive to hear it.

"Morris, Morris!—my husband!" she screamed forth. "Oh! my dear husband, who has done this?" and then she fell forward into strange arms which were held out to break her fall.

"Her husband! Did she say her husband?" asked the bewildered Methodist. "The poor girl's brain has given way. I told you to keep her back from such a sight as this. How could he be her husband? Lucy! Lucy!"

But she had said, "My husband;" and there were many in the little crowd who had heard it, and would add it to the news of that memorable day, and spread it in Skegs Shore.

## CHAPTER XV.

### AFTERWARDS.

WHEN Lucy came back to her bitter, waking world, the sun was high in the heavens and the day was two hours older. For two hours she had lain in the front parlour defying all attempts to bring her back to consciousness, and now she was very weak and ill, and without the strength to rise from the little couch whereon she had been placed. The sun was very bright and blinding in its glare, she thought, and she closed her eyes and sighed heavily. Then she opened them suddenly again, and looked at three men in the room as at three strangers whom she had never seen, and who were regarding her with grave anxiety. The doctor was there with his hand upon her pulse—the man who had doctored Lincolnshire for five and twenty miles round,

and for five and twenty years had killed or cured about an equal proportion; her father was standing by the fireside with his hands behind him, and his rugged face full of a deep grief for her; and at the window stood John Woodhatch, stern and silent and solicitous. The news had been brought early to Farm Forlorn—Lucy had seen from her window the messenger despatched—and John Woodhatch, on receiving the news, had saddled his best horse and galloped like a madman to Larcom's house. And she did not know either of these men, but looked vacantly and fearfully at them.

"Lucy," said her father at last.

"Where's Morris?—my Morris?" came the answer back.

"Lucy, don't ye know me? Don't ye——"

"Let her be, Alec," said John Woodhatch.

"Why worry her like this?"

Strange that the voice seemed more familiar to her ears than her own father's, but it was so.

"John!" she exclaimed. "Is that John Woodhatch?"

"Yes—it's John," said Mr. Larcom.

"He did not kill him, did he?" she asked in an excited whisper, and clinging suddenly

to the doctor's arm with both her hands. "That man has not killed my husband, has he, sir?"

"Hush! hush! my dear—of course not. Pray be calm. Try and sleep again," the doctor urged.

The Methodist groaned and wrung his hands.

"Her mind has gone," he said. "Did ye hear her, John?—did ye mark what she said?"

"I heard her," came the deep answer back; and John Woodhatch still stood with his back to the window, looking mournfully at her.

"My dear," says Alec Larcom, "the doctor says you must not speak yet."

"Very well," she answered wearily.

"And ye know me, don't ye, now, Lucy?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes—I think I do."

She closed her eyes, and went slowly off into another stupor, with the doctor reproving the two men for talking together as they did.

"She will be better presently—if you leave her alone," said Mr. Pelson testily. "Is there



not any woman to be found who can see to her?"

"There is Mrs. Chadderton," suggested Mr. Larcom. "Will ye send for her, John? I am vary helpless at present. I am like a child."

"Not Mrs. Chadderton," answered the farmer. "I cannot spare her."

Mr. Larcom looked at him, and John Woodhatch added, "She would make a bad nurse at any time. And I don't think Lucy likes her."

"I will get some one in the village, then," said Mr. Larcom; "but—but this is not going to be a lang illness, doctor, is it?"

"I can't tell at present," answered Mr. Pelson.

"John—come wi' me into the fresh air. Let ye and me talk this over. It's like an awful dream just now," said Mr. Larcom in a husky whisper. "Lucy like a mad woman, and her husband—good Lord, how was it, I wonder?—lying dead next door. This is no light trooble for any of us three."

"It is not," answered Woodhatch, as he and the Methodist stepped into the front garden,

and stood there conversing, with the villagers still hanging about, waiting for policemen, newspaper reporters, anything to give fresh animation to the scene, and a further fillip to the general proceedings.

"If Lucy is to be ill, and want a nurse—and the Lord save us from any nuisance of the kind, John—I should think Mrs. Chadderton would be the woman after all," said Mr. Larcom. "She is no stranger to us—and I can't bear strangers. What made you think Lucy did not like her?"

"Does anybody like her?" said Woodhatch moodily. "Do you?"

"I—I don't know," said Larcom in reply. "I've never thought of it."

"And I don't think she likes Lucy—she was jealous of her coming to the farm, and acting as its mistress, whilst I was in London," said Woodhatch. "Didn't you see that?"

"I didn't see anything—I'm a blind beetle; that's as true as the gaspel, John. I'm a dull, stoopid ass," he cried. "And here is Lucy married—married on the sly, like a crafty, seelfish wench, afraid of her own father!—and I thinking of the loving, dootiful child

that God had blessed me with. John, did ye know it, or anything about it ? ”

“ I knew it for the first time yesterday.”

“ Who told ye ? ”

“ The one dead in Zion Chapel,” he said sharply,—“ the poor fellow torn away from earth, as though he had been a weed. And I had had such plans for him and Lucy, to show I was not jealous of him, or bore him any ill will, as perhaps he thought I did.”

“ Why should he ? ”

“ I told him to go,” was the reply. “ To leave the farm at once, and for good.”

“ There was a quarrel, then ? ” said Mr. Larcom somewhat quickly.

“ No—not a quarrel exactly.”

“ There was—— Wait a minute, I can hear her voice again.”

Mr. Larcom stepped back into the cottage, and then returned, shaking his head sorrowfully.

“ No. It was all my fancy. Have you seen Morris’s sister lately ? ” he asked suddenly.

“ Yes.”

“ Where does she live now ? ”

“ At Boston.”

"She had better be communicated with," said Mr. Larcom.

"I have telegraphed already," was the answer.

"Good fellow!" said Larcom, pressing his hand; "always thinking of the right thing to do and say, and at the right time. I wish I had your forethought."

"And I wish I had your cool, hard brains," cried the other petulantly, "and could look at all this horror with as much composure."

"I am not camposed at all," exclaimed the father; "I am vary much deesturbed, John."

"I don't see it."

"But I'm mair deesturbed aboot my lassie than that man in there," said the parson. "Now the shock is over, I can only see he played me a sorry trick in getting Lucy to deceive me."

"It is late in the day to reproach him," answered Woodhatch.

"Ay—I own that."

"He was a warm-hearted lad—a little hasty—more than a little weak; he was very young—but there was time before him," mused the farmer.

"And now there's eternity. It's a sarlemn thought, John," muttered the Methodist. "Hush! I can surely hear her now."

He went once more into the house, and once more returned with a disappointed look upon his face.

"Let us try to find a nurse for her," he said.

"Do you think Kitty Vanch would do?" asked Woodhatch.

"The girl from Bolter's Rents?" Larcom replied; "was not her name Vanch?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Along with Morris's sister," answered Woodhatch; "I have told you so before."

"I don't recollect anything to-day," said the other, with a groan. "I can't remember! And yet ye say how cool I am," he added reproachfully. "What makes ye think I'm cool?"

John Woodhatch did not answer him. He was thinking very deeply.

"No, Kitty will not do here, I'm thinking," said Mr. Larcom; "she's not good enough for Lucy, is she?"

"Yes—she is," he replied; "but neverthe-

less she had better stay away. There's Greg to be considered."

"Yes—there's Greg."

"And he must not know where she is," said John Woodhatch, "not for years."

He had forgotten Morris Brake's death, it seemed, or else he was glad to change the topic of conversation—Mr. Larcom thought the latter. But there was no changing that for long, with people looking askance at them, and the bloody stain upon the dusty road, a witness to the deed, and an outcry against him who had committed it.

"Let us find a nurse in the village," said Larcom; and the two men went slowly, side by side, towards the railway station and the cluster of houses grouped around it.

"To think Lucy should ha'e deceeved a man like me!" said Mr. Larcom suddenly again, as they walked on, and as if the slight were set very deeply in his mind; "it's surpreesing! How much of all this will they drag into the inquest on her boy-husband, I wander, John?"

John Woodhatch did not reply. He was wondering at more than that.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“WHY ARE THE HANDS SO STILL?”

To trace step by step, and link by link, the tragedy of Morris Brake's death, comes not within the purport of this story. It is sufficient to record that no clue to the murderer was afforded by any evidence forthcoming at the inquest. The story remained as a dark blot upon the fair fame of Skegs Shore, and there was much conjecture as to the motive of the crime, but not an atom's worth of proof. Moreover, it was a crime that did not pass out of the recollection of these quiet Lincolnshire folk, or was to be set aside for fresh crimes and further villainies, as in the records of great cities, where crime is an every-day occurrence, and has its allotted daily space in every newspaper, for the amusement of the readers.

There was no new murder to follow Morris Brake's, and Skegs Shore had been without a sensation since the Conquest or thereabouts, when the Fen tribes were savages, and lived and died like savages in the wild Fen lands which no sane man had attempted to explore.

They would talk of young Brake, and how he had met his death, for years; the inn parlours and the corners of the market-place would echo with the story, and each man or woman would have his or her idea respecting it. John Woodhatch was a man who had done much good in the country, and spent much money in wages, but there were ugly rumours against him now, and who had set them going it was impossible to trace. People remembered that John Woodhatch had been courting the Methodist's daughter, and that Morris Brake had stolen a march upon him and married her off hand. A good man John Woodhatch, but what would not jealousy do even amongst good folk?—what had it not done from the day when Shakespeare's black man smothered Desdemona? They did not say John Woodhatch was jealous, but they whispered amongst themselves that it might



be so, and they had heard in some strange way that Morris was leaving Farm Forlorn on the very day he was found dead by the waggoner—just as Fladge had gone away suddenly afterwards, and been provided with some berth in Lincoln city, they believed. At all events he had disappeared, and might be murdered, too, for what they knew to the contrary, for no one in Skegs Shore had set eyes on Reuben Fladge again.

People began to think that Farm Forlorn was an uncanny place, and to remember that its owner had once been in the clutch of the police and under sentence in a reformatory, and that he had a craze for the company of sinners, and wild projects for reforming sinners—which projects might be all dissimulation in so deep a man—and theories for their salvation by work. A wonderful faith in work had this John Woodhatch—a Carlylean faith, Skegs Shore folk would have said, had they ever heard of Carlyle—and a man who could preach about it, when lured into argument, with all the vehemence of Larcom the Methodist when firing away his hardest at Zion Chapel. A man who spent much money in carrying out,

or attempting to carry out, his principles—money that would have been better expended on honest people who were hard up and *not* too fond of work, absolutely hated work, a few of them. Still John Woodhatch was a force and power in Skegs Shore, and was only talked about behind his back—as who is not in these scandal-loving times, from princes of the blood royal to Sally in our alley? He was an eccentric and mysterious kind of man, with eccentric and mysterious surroundings, but to be respected as one who spent his money freely in the county, and was thought by a great many, who were not suspicious, to be the soul of honour after his own queer fashion.

The inquest had brought no fresh facts to light—or very few new facts which are necessary to recount in this place. The Methodist was the principal witness, along with the waggoner and the Methodist's daughter, thin and white and ghostlike, who had to depose quietly but firmly that she was the last to see Morris Brake alive—that he had stolen in the night-time from the farm, after a habit that he had had for months, it was confessed, to see her. He had brought her news that he

was going away from Farm Forlorn for good ; that he had had a few words with Mr. Woodhatch, to whom he had confessed his secret marriage. But they had parted good friends, Morris had told her, and Mr. Woodhatch had advised him to have nothing to do with Mr. Scatterwait, but to leave his future in the master's hands. What Mr. Woodhatch had intended to do for Morris Brake she did not know, and the question was not asked her.

It was asked, however, if she had a suspicion of any one in this bad, black business of Morris's murder, and she said she had not now. Being pressed as to her first impressions, she remarked that all was confusion and horror to her, and she remembered only that Morris Brake was killed, that she had been ill and mentally afflicted, and that her life was in danger for three days ; and the world had seemed then a terrible place, from which she would have been glad to escape at any sacrifice.

Afterwards it was remarked that, for a while, there was a look of fear upon her when she met John Woodhatch—still her father's friend, and hers, if she would have him—but that as

time wore on so that expression grew very faint, and died at last away.

"I shall find out some day who killed my Morris," she said; "that is the aim and object of my life."

"It's a poor object at the best," said her father; "and ye'll have to leave it to wiser heads, child."

"I shall be always watching, planning."

"You asked me one day if I had killed him," said Woodhatch moodily. "Do you remember that, Lucy?"

"That day is a cruel dream to me," she answered.

"But you do not think that now?" he asked very firmly, "as others may be thinking."

"Others?"

"Those who do not know me as you do, and would make a scandal of it," he added.

She put her hand in his and held it very closely, looking into the bronzed face of the man whom she had known from her own childhood's days, and had always feared a little; and they were clear, unflinching eyes which met her own, and answered them.

"No, you would not have harmed my Morris," she said.

John Woodhatch drew a deep breath of relief, and said—

"Thank you. What other people think does not matter to me."

"Is it any use talking of this? Does it do any good?" asked Mr. Larcom.

"I should like to speak of it sometimes," replied Lucy, "to show I am not afraid; that I am thinking of him, and the grievous wrong done me by taking him away."

"That was the will of the Lard," said Mr. Larcom solemnly; "and ye are reseesting it if ye talk like that of wrang."

"Then I resist it," she said firmly, and with a gleam in her blue eyes that was significant.

"Ye were not an obedient child, or honoured your father overmuch, Lucy; and this affleec-tion—which I own was an affl——"

John Woodhatch interrupted him roughly.

"That will do, Alec," he said sternly; "we will have no argument on this matter. Lucy's is too great a sorrow to be disturbed by your reproaches."

"I don't raproach her," answered Larcom.

"You may if you will; I will not grieve any the more, or less," she added; and the two men exchanged sad glances with each other, as if they understood that the worst had come to Lucy Brake, and she would never be the same again in mind or body, if they were not careful of her.

It was no use advising her. She listened at times to advice as to change of air and scene and occupation, but she followed it not in any one particular. She was always grave and thoughtful, but obedient. She took her place at the harmonium in the little chapel again, as part and parcel of her duty; but it was noticed she never sang a note of music now, and that she had a strange habit of looking at the floor—at the very spot where she had first seen Morris lying dead. What would become of Lucy Brake as months and years went on, was one of the questions which Skegs Shore asked itself? Would Time act its great part of healer, and bring the smiles and colour back to the pale face, or would she fade away and join her husband presently?—she, so young still!

Of the details of the secret marriage, little was said, and less known. It was a pure love-story enough; the romance of boy and girl, each acting rashly, but in a manner they considered was the best and safest—a method which would secure them for each other, and give them the courage to oppose the wishes of those who would have parted them at any cost. No new story this. The romance of two young souls loving and unwise, but with an immense faith in the strength of their affection, and with little knowledge of themselves—a romance that might have ended sadly, had Morris even lived, John Woodhatch was disposed to think, although Lucy could only see what might have been through the mists of blinding tears, and was so sure—so very sure—that all would have been a perfect happiness with her husband. Ever before her was the last picture in which he was enshrined, and where he had played Romeo to her Juliet with as much passion in his heart as he of old Verona. How they had whispered that night of their future, and set their puny wits to work to smooth the little troubles which would come to them with the

revelation of the truth, and which their strong love would so easily surmount! How they had talked of John Woodhatch, and of his promise to do something for them; to stand between them and her father's grief and anger at deceiving him; to set them up in the world they were beginning at an early age, and to be—honest, thoughtful John—always their true friend! How they had talked of themselves, and forgotten John Woodhatch altogether; and Morris had assured her there were no more troubles for them now,—only a little uncertainty, and a few hard words to bear, and then the happy future, and the happy ending to a pleasant love-tale.

And this was the end of it, and of all their bright young dreams; and Lucy Brake was a widow before she was eighteen years of age.

Thus time stole on, month by month and year by year, swiftly and silently—like the deep, noiseless river that it is—bearing away all things to the sea which rolls around this world. Morris had been dead three years, and Lucy was the mother of a little girl who was wondrously like him, and had been born some eight months after the young husband's



decease. It was the birth of this child which had saved Lucy Brake from a madhouse—which had given her new thoughts and feelings, new ambitions and hopes, a new path in life across the unknown fields stretching away to a land upon which the sun might presently shine. From the time that the child grew well and strong—for its little life had been despaired of during the first two months—did Lucy begin to grow well and strong also, to present to those who watched her some semblance of her former self. She was sad enough as a rule, but it was observed that she could smile sweetly and spontaneously at the little baby face, looking down at the blessing which God had brought to her, and for which she was deeply thankful.

One day, when she was sitting at the door of her father's house—this was in the second summer following Morris's death—a strange figure in tattered raiment advanced slowly up the garden path, and made her heart beat rapidly at the sight of him.

"Father, who is this? Do you recollect?" she asked, in a short, sharp tone of voice which had been noticeable after Morris's death, but which had left her lately.

Mr. Larcom was sitting in the garden in his shirt-sleeves, smoking his long clay pipe and presenting a very rural and unparsonlike appearance. Lucy had her child in her arms, with its fair ringlets nestled against her heart.

"No—I don't know him, Lucy," answered Mr. Larcom. "Here, clear oot o' this, man. Ye'll get nothing by coming oot of ye'er way. I've no mooney to spare for vagrants."

But the tramp came on just the same, with long, uneven strides, and when he was close upon them, Mr. Larcom recognized Reuben Fladge, now a high-shouldered, white-faced man, unshorn, ragged, and dirty, a poor wreck of the youth he had seen last at Farm Forlorn.

"Blass me! is that ye, Fladge?" he cried. "Why, where on airth have ye been all this time?"

"Working—or trying to work. That's about it," he answered very sullenly.

"In Lincolnshire?"

"No, very far from Lincolnshire. Many miles ayond it. And I'm hard up and dead beat," said Fladge.

"Do ye want assistance?" asked Mr. Larcom.

"I will take it from you—or her," he answered, looking hard at Lucy.

"I was about to absarve, Fladge, that the old master would be sarry to see ye brought down so low as this."

"He sorry?"

"Yes."

"All his fault it is—not mine," said Fladge.

"And he would help ye—gladly eno'."

"I shan't go to him. I daren't go to him!"

"Do you bear him ill will, Fladge?" asked Lucy curiously.

"Who, me!" exclaimed Fladge, with a half-shriek that scared the pipe out of Mr. Larcom's mouth, and frightened the little child. "What, me? Good Lord! I'd tear my heart out for him if it was to save him trouble, or do him any good. I'd let him kill me, if he'd only ask me—willingly. I've come to you to tell me, if you will, how is he—how's the lot of 'em?"

"And ye will not go and ask for yeerself?" said the parson.

Fladge shuddered visibly.

"No, I can't do that."

"They're all pretty fairly wa'al," said Mr.

Larcom, feeling in every pocket for a stray sixpence which he was sure he had put there in the morning.

"The master's well?"

"Yes."

"And Mrs. Chadderton?"

"About as wa'al and as leevely as usual," was the dry reply.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Fladge; but it was not the old hearty laugh, but a discordant and strange cry. "And Spikins, and Greg, and all of 'em? All alive, and there with him, just the same?"

Mr. Larcom nodded.

"Tell them I asked — will you, Mr. Larcom?"

"Yes, I will; and here's saxpence, Fladge, if it's any use to ye. And if ye'll tak' my advееce, ye'll go to——"

Fladge snatched the money from his hand.

"I'll take the sixpence, but not the advice, parson," he said; "and I'd drop down dead afore I went on farther. Why, I should—I know I should."

He looked at Lucy, and at the little girl upon her lap; and who instantly hid her

face away from him, and began to sob with fear.

"His child!" he asked, in a sudden and strange whisper—"Morris's?"

"Yes," answered Lucy mournfully.

"His eyes; exact!"

"Yes. You remember him well, Fladge; don't you?"

"Ay, I do. He brought me down to this; turned me thief again; he got me into prison over there. All him!" cried Fladge.

"Oh no, no, no!" cried Lucy, distressed at this accusation.

"It *was* through him I went against the master; and the master was hard, and wouldn't forgive me. Tell Mr. Woodhatch that, parson; won't you, now?" continued Fladge; "won't you?"

"I'm not so sure. The master has enough to worry him without ye," was the answer.

"Ay, then doan't tell him," muttered Fladge.

He looked at Lucy again thoughtfully.

"Was any one taken up for the murder?" he asked in a low voice.

"No one."

"That's strange, now. No one."

He nodded his head slowly towards them, and then limped away in the direction he had come, as though he had fulfilled his mission. At the bend of the road he looked back towards them, and shook his hand in farewell—a spectral kind of figure, with the red evening sky for a lurid background.

Lucy covered her face with her right hand, and broke down a little.

"He brings back the cruel past. Why did he come to me?" she cried.

"The Lord knows. He looks vary mad and vary sad; poor Fladge!" the father replied.

"What made him ask if any one had been arrested?" she said.

"My dear Lucy, how can I tell?"

"And I said, 'No one,'" she continued thoughtfully. "No one. Why are the Hands so still, father?"

"The Hands?" repeated Mr. Larcom absently.

"The Hands of Justice, which should be

full of strength and power and life ; and from which no murderer should escape."

"Except into the Hands of God, child," answered Mr. Larcom solemnly

BOOK THE THIRD.  
FIVE YEARS AFTERWARDS.





## CHAPTER I.

### VISITORS TO SKEGS SHORE.

WE take up the thread of our story some five years after the murder of Morris Brake at Skegs Shore—five years which have affected our characters, materially changing them for better or for worse. The rule governing all characters beyond the sphere of story-books, and therefore nothing to be marvelled at, it is simply our task to record the fact, and to show how the law of universal change has worked with those whose lives we have set ourselves to follow.

Five years had hardly passed by, for it was summer yet, and there was company at Skegs Shore. It was August, real hot August weather, too, and Skegs Shore was in its season. It was in the height of its season, when the one basket chaise and pony in the

place—to be hired by giving due notice at the Swan—was to be met with in the green lanes, and when, if you brought your own Bath chair, a man could be found to bump you along half a mile of rutty path and sand-bank to the sea-shore, where the company assembled between eleven and one in the morning, and were seen no more for the remainder of the day; where children ran and romped, and shrieked with laughter, till the sun went down, and the nursemaids took them home to bed, their little tired legs toddling away in all directions across the drifts of sand. The Skegs Shore round about the railway station was the actual watering-place of this part of the world. Farm Forlorn, lying two miles away, was not a portion of it, and people particular in addresses added “Near Skegs Shore,” to make sure of letters reaching Mr. Woodhatch.

Skegs Shore did not push itself forward to encourage visitors in any way. There it was, to patronize or leave alone—an old-fashioned Lincolnshire village, undreamed of out of Lincolnshire by most folk, and not well known even in the county. No buildings

went on here—not even a cottage had been erected for the last twenty years ; the population did not increase, for as most people grew up they took train away from it and were not heard of again. An archæologist or two, in the course of the year, would arrive from some learned centre to inspect the church, and harass the vicar or the sexton with unnecessary questions ; and an artist once or twice had looked round, and, as a rule, had departed very hastily. Still, it had its season, being near the sea, and having as fine a stretch of sand as any watering-place in England. There were not wanting prophets to foretell even a future for Skegs Shore—a time when rows of lodging-houses should form terraces and crescents, when a big hotel should rise like a giant from the sand-hills, and an iron pier of the usual spider frame and daddy-longlegs style of construction be run out a hundred yards into the water to shake like a jelly beneath the tramp of future visitors, listening to the braying of a German band which would be always blue with cold.

But this was a dream of the far-away future, based upon the ambitious struggles of other

places round about the coast ; at present, as at the time of our story, Skegs Shore was simply somnolent and rigid. The season had not brought the native energy into much activity ; it was a place where visitors came for quiet, and invariably found it ; where children were brought for fresh air, and never missed it either, there being an undue quantity about ; where a tired business man from Boston, Grantham, or Lincoln could rest, almost as if he were in his grave, so little notice would be taken of him, and so little life about him would he find. There were no houses nearer than the village itself, with the exception of one humpbacked cottage belonging to the coastguard, and where one man on duty might be seen now and then tramping disconsolately along the sand-hills with a telescope under his arm, waiting for the smugglers that never came—indeed, that had not been heard of since the year 1820. For Skegs Shore was not even a fishing village, or a boating station—although there was one big old boat lying keel uppermost amongst the coarse grass five hundred yards from the water's edge, like a small misanthropic barge.

which had turned its back upon the sea, and was completely done with it. And lying high and dry also, and sacred to the memory of a great storm some thirty years ago, there stuck out from the sand the long, gaunt ribs of a foreign schooner, looking terribly like the bones of a huge sea-monster which had died there and been too big to bury; and here, in and out these oaken and weather-beaten timbers, played the happy children, dreaming not of past wreckage and disaster, and of the white upturned sailor's faces floating out to sea, with never a soul to say God-speed.

Skegs Shore, being in its season then, had its small share of visitors five years after the events recorded in our last book. "There was a matter of fifty grown-up furriners in the place," one of the inhabitants had been heard to declare in the taproom of the Swan, the foreigners being anything and anybody not patent to Skegs Shore. Where the "fifty grown up furriners" got to—supposing the information not to be grossly exaggerated—it was difficult to discover, unless they had arrived as invalids by the last train and imme-

diately taken to their beds after finding shelter for the night. Nevertheless there were strange faces to be seen in the village, and the basket chaise had twice carried to the sandy shore, or as near to the shore as a pair of weak springs would allow, two ladies, who walked the rest of the distance to the sea, and were fetched in exactly two hours time by the clock in the great stone turret of St. Mungo.

They were a strange contrast, these two, even for mistress and maid, or rather mistress and companion, as they might be more properly designated. The elder woman was the mistress, a small, spare being of some thirty-five years of age, with a sallow and lined face that would have been "oldish" for a woman twenty years her senior—the face of a woman of ill health, and who had probably suffered all her life, to be worn down to a shade like this. At her side, supporting her with her right arm, and guiding her steps with the utmost care, was the maid, companion, nurse—for all these posts were Kate Vanch's at certain and uncertain intervals; and a tall, well-formed, dark-eyed young woman, the picture of health and strength, was she whom we

have heard in old days called Kitty of Bolter's Rents, and a wild and unmanageable Kitty too, if Drury Lane history could be relied upon. If John Woodhatch, in his search for sinners, and in his years of effort to turn them into penitents—not saints—had only been rewarded by this one example of his perseverance, it was something to repay him for his studies, or to recompense him for his disappointments. Kitty, ostensibly at least, was a success; he had warned her and counselled her, taken her away from bad hands and put her safely into good ones; he had told her a strange story of her future, as though he were a prophet and could regulate it by word and deed hereafter; he had won her confidence—of late years her reverence; he had turned her away from darkness unto light almost as by a miracle; and she had profited by the one fair chance which had been offered her. Almost by a miracle, we say, for so many things had happened to bring about this transformation—and happened strangely, too—and which we will speak of in future pages of our story. And here was the result in this tall, good-looking, quiet girl in black—



here up to the present time, at least, was a fair success for the philanthropist. John Woodhatch thought so; and it was the fixed conviction of Hester Brake, her mistress, a woman of some perspicacity, and who had had every opportunity of judging her companion. She had had six years in which to study Kate Vanch and help to form her character aright, and she had faith in the result. This was the satisfactory end of it, she thought; as if the end of a girl's life were one and twenty years, and nothing after that could mar its sweet perfectibility;—as if one woman ever understood another in this one-sided hemisphere, some sharp-tongued, sceptical old bachelor might say here with unwarrantable acerbity, and yet with a faint approximation to the truth. Who knows?

Miss Brake was a fragile and somewhat nervous woman, and her appearance at Skegs Shore hardly appeared consistent at first sight. Needing change of air—even a keen sea air to bring some semblance of new strength to her—it was strange she should have selected Skegs Shore, quiet as the place was and free from the usual run of visitors. For here

Morris Brake, her brother, had been murdered, and it was a grim association to connect with the summer's holiday. But then Miss Brake did not always act as other people would have done under similar circumstances, and there were a few folk in the world who had never been quite able to make Miss Brake out, or to measure her actions by the square and rule of every-day life. She had her "little ways," they said in Boston where she lived.

She had not been at Skegs Shore before; the news of her young brother's death five years ago had not brought her in hot, wild haste to this scene of tragedy—could not have brought her, we may add at once, as John Woodhatch's telegram had struck her down as with a broadsword, and she lay, a helpless, sorrowing woman for many weeks which followed. When she was about again she never spoke of visiting the place, of seeing Morris's grave in the churchyard, and so years had passed, till on one eventful day a letter startled Lucy Brake and her father.

It was written by Kitty Vanch, to the dictation of Miss Brake, who had hardly the strength to hold a pen. Lucy had not heard

from her sister-in-law before, had never received a letter of condolence with her grief, or faint acknowledgment even of the relationship between them, brought about by Morris's secret marriage.

*"I am coming for my holidays to Skegs Shore,"* the letter ran, *"and shall be glad to see you presently."*

Where or when, or at what hour of the day or night, was not specified in the letter, which Lucy marvelled at, and which Lucy's father put on a broad-rimmed pair of spectacles to study for himself.

"The last place for a weak woman to come," he said; "and I don't see the necessity of her troobling ye now, Lucy."

"I have often thought I should like to see her, father," answered Lucy.

"Why?"

"She is Morris's sister. She was very fond of him, I know; but then everybody was," she added thoughtfully.

"She would have done better to keep away," said Mr. Larcom, roughing his long grey hair the wrong way as he spoke. "It will upset ye, this visit; it will bring back the old meesery of it all."

"We shall talk of him a great deal," said Lucy, "and she will see her niece for the first time in her life."

"It's a bother. I wonder if John Wood-hatch knows she is coming."

"Does it matter?"

"Not at all to him. But for your sake, Lucy, I could have wished she had kept to Boston," was the answer.

But Miss Brake did not keep to Boston, and a few days later came a second message.

"*I shall be on the sands to-morrow morning at twelve,*" was all the second letter said.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE MEETING ON THE SANDS.

THE sands at Skegs Shore sounded a vague place of appointment, but Lucy did not think her sister-in-law would be difficult to discover. The visitors were few, and she was sure she would be able to recognize Miss Brake at once. It was the manner of making the appointment which troubled her a little, and rendered her not a little thoughtful; a hasty line on the back of a postcard was not a graceful way of intimating a desire to see her, and there was scant evidence of affection, hardly of courtesy, in appointing an interview upon the sands, and at Miss Brake's own time and pleasure. Still there was an earnest desire to see Morris's sister, and exchange, if possible, sympathy with her. She was as strangely drawn towards her as if a spell were working to bring about their meeting.

By twelve o'clock the next day she was on the sands. It was a bright, breezy morning, and the few visitors in the place were scattered in little black dots along the low-lying coast, the juvenile portion of the community in the usual state of excitement which the possession of shovels and pails invariably creates.

Lucy had brought her little daughter with her; they were inseparable companions, two links of one life. To lose her would be to lose all hope in God's mercy, she had told her father passionately once, and her father had shaken his head and said ill would come of such a rash assertion. He was not a superstitious man, but he feared the creating of one idol in his daughter's heart might be followed by the dashing of that idol to the ground. It had been God's decree so often! Little Morice was not a delicate girl, but harm might come to her in a hundred ways, and Lucy acted as if she were for ever on guard against an unseen calamity threatening her child. Was there not some one living who had hated Morris Brake—and who might hate his little daughter? To Lucy's mind there were unseen dangers lurking at Skegs Shore, and it was

no matter of wonderment that she should, to the best of her ability, be for ever on guard against them.

When Lucy descended from the sandy path to the deeper sands of the coast she saw Miss Brake at once, and knew it was she. The two women in black, sitting on a thick shawl spread upon the sands, and looking straight at her as she and Morice advanced, were her sister-in-law and maid. Morris had often described his sister to her; and this woman, with the face working and twitching with nervous excitement, and with her deep-set dark eyes fixed upon her steadily, was surely she.

"You are—Miss Brake, I think," Lucy began, hesitatingly and yet rapidly; "Hester Brake, of Boston—his sister?"

"Yes; but you are not Lucy—his widow?" was the quick reply.

"I am Lucy Brake."

It was noticed by the maid in attendance—dark-eyed like her mistress, only the eyes were large and lustrous—that Miss Brake put forth no hand of welcome, and that the voice was sharper than its wont. Lucy regarded her with some astonishment.

"This is my brother's little girl, then?" Miss Brake asked at once.

"Yes."

"What is her name?"

"Morice."

"That is a man's name, whether in French or English," said Miss Brake. "Why give it to the child?"

"My husband's name was Morris, and I liked the name," said Lucy, "and would keep it always in remembrance. It is a woman's name sometimes, I think."

"Sit down here by my side, and let me look at you closely. Do you know," she said, as Lucy followed her request, "that Morris never mentioned your name to me in all his life?"

"Did he not?" said Lucy, surprised.

"Not once in his poor short life."

"I wonder at that," said Lucy. "To me he used to speak of you so often."

"Did he tell you I was a fretful and disappointed woman?" she inquired; "an unjust being altogether?"

"Oh no! He said you were very kind and good, and anxious to do good to others."



"He was a bad judge of character," she answered with a sigh, "and knowing so little of the world, he was readily deceived. Poor Morris! That child is like him. Do you see the resemblance, Kate?" she asked, turning to her companion.

"Yes, I think I do."

Lucy regarded the last speaker critically and wonderingly.

"Did you know my husband, then?" she asked.

"I have been your sister's maid for nearly six years, Mrs. Brake, and I saw her brother several times at Boston," was the answer.

"He never spoke of you, that I remember," said the young widow.

"He was secretive always. Fond of mystery, romance, false sentiment, poor fellow. This is Miss Vanch, my companion rather than my maid—a very trustworthy friend," added Miss Brake, by way of introduction; and the young women bowed to each other, and little Morice walked across to Kate, evidently preferring the young fresh face to the sallow and lined countenance of the elder lady, and displayed to her in confidence a new pair of

boots with which her mother had provided her that morning. Presently there was a merry laugh from Morice, and the mother called her to her own side quickly.

"You must sit still, Morice dear. Sit here by me," she said.

Little Morice replied with the request immediately.

"She is too young to sit still," remarked Miss Brake.

"Oh no, she is not," answered the mother.

"Let her run about the sands, whilst we talk together for a while," suggested Miss Brake.

"No, no—thank you," answered the mother, "not alone; Morice never goes alone anywhere."

"Kate can take the child for a walk," said Miss Brake.

"She is accustomed to remain with me," was the reply; "she is used to sitting still."

"But she will come with me perhaps for this once," suggested the maid, "and if you do not mind, Mrs. Brake. I am very fond of children." Because she had never been a

child herself, she might have added, almost with strict truth, poor Kitty !

But still Lucy Brake was singularly persistent.

"I would much prefer her remaining here, thank you," she said, putting her arm round the child's neck in order to keep her in her place, and restrain Morice's wish to scramble to her feet and accompany her new friend forthwith—she who had had no friends save the mother till that day.

"Kate can keep her in sight of us," suggested her sister-in-law, equally as persistent that little Morice should withdraw with her maid; "and she will not hurt her in any way."

"I know—I know that," answered Lucy; "but——"

"But I wish it. I have something to say to you which we can only discuss alone."

"Very well," said Lucy reluctantly. "Don't take her far, Miss Vanch. I should not like to lose sight of her for an instant. You see," she added, with a faint, forced smile as Kitty walked slowly away with the child, "I am a poor, weak-nerved woman to whom the shock

of a husband's sudden death was like a second death itself—a death of every hope, until that child was born.”

“Which was new hope to you?” was the strange inquiry.

“Yes. A something for which I tried to live again. And if I lose her now—if she even loved me less, or loved others more, I should surely die at once,” cried Lucy.

Miss Brake regarded her companion very closely; the suppressed excitement in herself seemed nothing by comparison with this beautiful young woman's. Here was a new study for her—possibly a new surprise.

“You are a jealous temperament, are you not?” she asked.

“I don't know. I can't say.”

“And seem very helpless, for one standing at the outset of life, and with life's happiness before her yet.”

“Oh no, no. Never before me.”

“Yes, I say,” replied the other. “You will marry again, and it is right you should.”

“Then I prefer wrong to right,” was the firm reply.

“Some women do, God help them,” was

the slow answer, "but not Lucy Brake, I hope."

The voice was kinder and more sympathetic, and Lucy grew less afraid of her.

"What do you want to say to me," she asked, "and that Miss Vanch must not hear?"

"I have so many things to say—I hardly know where to begin," Miss Brake answered. "I would prefer to hear you talk a while, so that in time—in a little time this morning, I mean—I may learn to understand you."

"Am I so hard to comprehend?"

"You are so young—so like a child yourself—so unlike the woman whom I expected to meet," was the reply.

"Indeed."

"I will be frank with you, Lucy," she said, and the young widow was pleased to be addressed by her Christian name; "but my idea was that Morris had married a woman older than himself, and had been inveigled into marriage."

"Oh! Miss Brake."

"Such things have been, and Morris was a youth very weak and vain."

"He was all that was good and noble and

generous; he had not an unselfish thought. Why do you speak so badly of him, and to me?" cried Lucy, indignantly now.

"I speak of his faults. He was no hero in my estimation, though I loved him very much. At times I feared for him," she said thoughtfully.

"I do not understand *you* now," murmured Lucy, looking after her child, and wondering why Kate Vanch did not turn instead of walking on and on away from her.

"I am not difficult to understand. I am simply a woman who has grown hard, and sceptical of human goodness," was the slow reply.

"And yet——"

"Yes, yes—and yet I am trusted, and there are people who love me. That girl you are looking after, for one."

"Why does she go so far away?" said Lucy.

"She is within sight. She——"

"There, they have turned at last! I was afraid they never would," cried Lucy, drawing a deep breath of relief.

"Kate Vanch gave you her word, I think."

"Ah! Miss Brake—like you, I have grown sceptical," said Lucy. "Pray forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," said Miss Brake, "unless it is the waste of time in idle discussion here. We are not business women, either of us."

"No," assented Lucy; "but I was not aware we had any business to discuss."

"Business?" she repeated thoughtfully; "well, it may come to it presently. Did Morris, who spoke of me so much to you," she said almost satirically, "ever tell you of his father and mother, and of his past life connected with them and me—and of why Mr. Woodhatch of Farm Forlorn took charge of him?"

Lucy shook her head.

"No; Morris has told me little of his early life. We——"

"Talked only of yourselves," interrupted the elder woman. "Lovers can scarcely have a theme more appropriate and congenial, for love is terribly selfish. Is it not?"

The weak woman with the face prematurely aged spoke as though love had not been unfamiliar to her either, and spoke with in-

creasing bitterness. One might have fancied love with her was synonymous with deceit, or she had seen so much deceit in it in others that it had appalled her for all time. A strange woman this—stranger than Lucy Brake had expected to find on the sands of Skegs Shore.

“Selfish—ah! I suppose it is,” Lucy answered, with a sigh, to the last question.

“And we are not here—you and I—to talk of love,” continued Miss Brake, “but to try and make each other out, if we can; and if we cannot, to shrug our shoulders and go our different ways. I don’t think,” she added, regarding Lucy attentively again whilst her own face twitched with evident emotion, “that you could lie to me without my seeing you were lying—and I begin to have some faith in you, finding you a child-wife, child-widow, and almost as helpless as myself.”

“I do not understand,” said Lucy for the second time. “You talk in riddles; you send my child away from me, and you tell me nothing.”

“You are impatient,” said Miss Brake, “and that is as natural as that I should be



loth to begin a subject very painful to us. Well, tell me this, before your child comes back with Kate,"—and here a shaking hand was laid upon Lucy's arm,—“who do you think, in your heart of hearts, killed my brother Morris?”

END OF VOL. I.







